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**ISSUES IN THE IDEOLOGY  
OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE  
(WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE  
TO NIGERIA)**

**By**

**Akilu Sani Indabawa**

**A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, PhD in the Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Education.**

**October, 1992.**

## **SYNOPSIS**

this dissertation I seek to establish, describe and justify the thesis that all educational knowledge, i.e. curriculum content is ideological. In order to do so, I shall make use of work in recent and contemporary philosophy, sociology of knowledge and political theory: an examination of the ideas of Marx is central.

Chapter One discusses the claims of the analytical philosophy of education, and includes that, this approach is not particularly appropriate to the present study. In its place, the methodology of social holism is adopted.

Chapter Two examines the term 'educational knowledge'. It starts from the classical, atomistic analysis, and by means of an holistic approach to knowledge interprets educational knowledge in its wider societal contexts.

Chapter Three examines an outline of the theory of ideology. Through a critical examination of the evolution of the term and particularly Marx's accounts, a theory of ideology in which collective interests play a prominent role is accepted, as most relevant to the present study.

Chapter Four addresses the issues of cultural relativism, and adopts in the end, a modified theory of cultural relativism.

Chapter Five carefully looks at Marx's accounts of the theory of social determination of knowledge. It concludes that, the basic claim of this theory, as well as its scattered accounts, are not sufficient, although they are necessary for any explanatory theory of the ideology of educational knowledge.

Chapter Six considers Marx's theory of 'the fetishism of the commodity', and argues that, it can provide complementary explanations for the ideology of educational knowledge.

Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine each considers the central conditions for Marx's fetishism theory as applied to the sociology of knowledge.

Chapter Ten puts forward a theory that I call 'the fetishism of educational knowledge', as an explanatory theory of the ideology of educational knowledge.

Chapter Eleven carefully considers some of the possible criticisms against the fetishism of educational knowledge, and argues that, the theory is a good one.

Chapter Twelve applies the explanatory theory to the Nigerian context.

It is concluded that the end of fetishism shall await the end of conflicts between collective interests of contending social forces within any society.



## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to

- the ever green memory of my father late Muhammadu Sani Indabawa;
- my mother Hajiya Sa'adatu Sani Indabawa whose affection, love and warmth (especially after the death of my father 30 years ago), continue to see me through the difficulties of life.

May Allah, the most high reward them both with the best of His rewards!

Ameen!

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October, 1992.

Akilu Sani Indabawa

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## INTRODUCTION

### **1 THE PRESENT STUDY**

I seek to examine in this dissertation the particular accounts of the ideological nature of what is taught in schools. I intend to examine these and related issues with particular reference to socially and politically plural and complex societies of Africa such as Nigeria. Nigeria, is a unity of various pre-colonial independent states and societies. As a political, social, and economic entity, Nigeria was a colonial creation in the opening years of this century. But it is emphasised that, this is not a study of Nigeria; rather it is a search for an explanatory theory of the ideology of educational knowledge which I intend to apply to the complex Nigerian society and its educational system.

The basic problem for this study is not one of determining whether or not educational knowledge is ideological. I shall provisionally accept the claim that, that knowledge which is selected for transmission in schools is ideological. But this basic claim is not simply taken for granted. Although my purpose is explaining the ideological nature of educational knowledge, but I do offer arguments (see 2: 35 - 9 and 5: 89 - 115)<sup>1</sup> in support of the claim that educational knowledge is ideological. The chief concern is not to develop these arguments because if the senses in which educational knowledge is taken to be ideological are described, then it would have been shown *pari passu*, that it is indeed ideological. It is recognised therefore, that, examining any particular account of the ideological nature of what is taught in schools at the same time entails in itself, some justifications of that particular account of the ideological nature of educational knowledge which is being investigated. What is taught in schools has a number of implications: epistemological, social and cultural, political,

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<sup>1</sup> I shall be using this style in making cross references to chapters, sections, and page numbers as the case may be in this dissertation.

economic, and so on. It is widely recognized that curricula policies are caught up in the social conflicts and pressures of the wider society. The real issue is not whether they are connected to these conflicts and pressures, but how and why. There is as such, a debate on how to explain the ideological character of what is taught in schools.

What has happened in the social sciences in this century is a move away from the paradigm of the natural sciences. The positivist basis of that paradigm is that there are some facts of the social world which exist out there, and that they can be studied in a value-free way. There are many sources of the 19th and 20th century criticisms of this view. One is that social facts are not independent of human agents but are constructed by them. So it follows that social inquiry cannot be neutral. Many accounts along this line follow the theory of the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann: 1979) as the methodology of interpretation.

Prominent in this regard and for the purposes of the present study, are Marx and Mannheim. Marx in particular placed emphasis on the human agent as the maker of his own history. This view is central to an understanding and analysis of the ideological nature of what is transmitted in schools.

The claims about the ideological nature of educational knowledge raise a number of problems which have some far-reaching implications for education and society. Such problems are even more intense in plural societies (such as Nigeria) which are characterised by cultural plurality, thereby compounding the explanations of the ideological nature of educational knowledge in such societies. For example, there are problems pertaining to the relationship between social collective's (a group or class) interests and the production of worthwhile knowledge for transmission in schools. Selecting and determining



educational knowledge by reference to the multiplicity of probable candidates may be contentious. The class or group source of the knowledge for transmission in schools is not sufficient (though it is necessary) for conceiving it to be ideological. Concealment or disguising of the collective's interests are further conditions. Interests are concealed in this case when knowledge is presented as being for the 'general good', while in actual fact it is not the case that it is. But this means that, one should distinguish between deliberate (i.e. concealment) and non-deliberate (i.e. disguise) hiding of reality, including genuine errors and mistakes. I shall attempt a position about which of these holds for the ideology of educational knowledge (see 8: 140 - 2). However there are problems in the extent to which one can, at a philosophical level, distinguish (from an 'Archimedian position'), between false-consciousness which deliberately conceals group's or class's interests on the one hand, and that which arises from problems of wrong or mistaken perceptions, and interpretations of reality (without any biases), on the other. Thus a test of rationality, which is itself non-ideological is needed. I shall subsequently address these problems.

It is the case that, the researches and debates which now dominate research in the social sciences, particularly disciplines such as 'Social Epistemology' or the 'Sociology of Knowledge' are largely conducted within the frameworks of advanced capitalism. But it is generally not clear if the conclusions drawn from the study of the politics of the production of knowledge in such a form of society are appropriate to very different forms of society. For example, it is not particularly clear if these can apply to the analysis of the ideology of the content of education in societies where varied and conflicting forms of societies co-exist or attempt to co-exist. What seems to work in advanced capitalism may not necessarily work in the developing countries, such as the African societies. However without any prejudice to the universal conclusions that are possible from such studies (of the phenomena in question in advanced capitalism), this

study will attempt to address the problem in the contexts of developing, not developed, capitalist societies. These are hybrid forms of societies in which capitalism is in the ascendancy consequent upon which other forms of social organizations with which it co-exists, but are in decay. Cultural pluralism and primordial patterns of identity in such societies, appear to command a measure of respect among various social actors, both private and public. It is interesting therefore to see the interplay between these, and the capitalist form of society, in relation to the politics of the production of curriculum knowledge. The task here therefore is to attempt, in the light of the co-existence of the different forms of societies, an account of the ideological nature of the official knowledge.

The premise for discussing and debating the problems of the ideological nature of educational knowledge is the proposition that all knowledge is socially determined. But the social determinist theory of knowledge has a series of weaknesses which will be the subject of inquiries (see 5: 89 - 115). The theory and its various formulations (on which there is much emphasis in the conventional sociology of knowledge), is insufficient as an account of the ideological nature of educational knowledge. The theory of social determination of knowledge is vague and presumptuous. It assumes too much because it makes apparently generous and sweeping claims. Social determinist theory of knowledge is largely taken for granted as obvious whereas it raises more difficulties than it apparently resolves. It leaves the appropriate interpretations of the relationship between educational knowledge and the social structure open. It relies more or less on its Marxist and neo-Marxist formulations. These issues will be critically examined (chapter five). The proposed dimension above (of cultural pluralism in relation to developing capitalism) provides for richer but conflicting grounds for examining issues in the production of knowledge.

This research is therefore an attempt to present and defend a thesis in the social philosophy of education. Particular reference is given to the application of social theory to issues in the politics of the production and dissemination of knowledge. It seeks to examine critically what a social determinist approach will understand to be the relationship between the content of education and ideology, by specific reference to the Nigerian society and educational system. The main task of the present study is to attempt to offer specific explanations of the ideological nature of what is taught in schools.

## **2 SOME LIMITATIONS TO THE PRESENT STUDY**

### **2.1 IDEOLOGY, THE NATURAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

To give a particular explanation of the ideological nature of what is selected and taught in schools, is to make a fundamental assumption about every subject offering in the school. Accordingly the humanities, the social and natural sciences are all taken to be ideological. There is a persisting debate about the problem of the relationship between science, technology and ideology. Lenin (1977), Habermas (1973), Feyerabend (1978) and many others have addressed the nature of this relationship. The basic interest here is not in the ideology of the Natural Sciences or Technology and allied disciplines. On the contrary the intention is to offer an explanatory theory in the light of which the ideology of the humanities and the social sciences only may be understood. No claims will be made about the status of the natural scientific knowledge taught in schools.

### **2.2 THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT**

This study finally seeks to apply an explanatory theory of the ideology of educational knowledge to Nigeria. If, finally, the account of the ideological nature of educational knowledge that explains the production and dissemination of educational knowledge in Nigeria, is found to be suitable to other contexts, that will strengthen the case for the theory. But in view of the concern for

Applying this study's finding, there is some emphasis on hybrid societies whose social structures are complex, thereby making claims to the ideological nature of the educational knowledge complex.

### 3 ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED

One of the main approaches in this study, follows Korner's (1969) replacement analysis. Replacement analysis is an attempt to improve and remedy a thought/proposition by illustrating its logical structure. Issues will be raised and critically examined. Positions and arguments will be arrived at through a critical survey of some of the positions and arguments articulated in the literature. But attempts will equally be made to provide some concrete examples to complement and elaborate the abstract arguments I shall be presenting. The principal concerns of this dissertation are as follows:

#### 1 A Methodological (theoretical) Framework

This study is grounded on a specific theoretical, intellectual perspective. Accordingly I shall attempt to assess critically the dominant theoretical instruments for doing Philosophy of Education in the Anglo-Nigerian tradition, to see whether or not they are appropriate for the present study. If they are not, an appropriate alternative theoretical framework which is agreeable to this study will have to be worked out.

Conclusions will be drawn, in relation to the research problem, the specific context in which I intend to apply the findings of the study and the methodological framework to be adopted. By means of these, explanations pertaining to the sense in which the production (and dissemination) of knowledge in relation to the varied ideological forms in plural societies will be offered.

## ii) An Interpretation of Educational Knowledge

I shall, for a number of reasons to be discussed later (1: 22 - 4 and 2: 25 - 31) employ the term 'educational knowledge' rather than 'knowledge' per se. While the nature of knowledge has been, and still remains hotly disputed, the same is not true for the term 'educational knowledge'. The force of educational knowledge and its meanings have most often been taken for granted. Hence the need for its serious discussion by means of the tools of philosophical analysis. It is only after coming to a view of what educational knowledge is, that its relationship to other phenomena including ideology, can be assessed. Further discussions, for example, regarding the contradictions in the ideology of educational knowledge, will then follow.

## iii) An Outline of a Theory of Ideology

Ideology is central to this work and it is therefore crucial to be clear of the particular usage or conceptions to be employed. Accordingly, some of the popular theories of ideology will be critically examined to see if any will be of relevance to the discussion. But if none is found to be appropriate to the context, issues, and, methodology of the study, then a specific conception of ideology which need not be universally valid but at least suitable for the present purpose will be proposed.

## iv) Cultural Pluralism and Relativism

The plurality of competing views of reality, interpretations of the world, cultures and, in general, measures of rationality, in a given society are the forms in which ideology is articulated and expressed. It is interesting for the purposes of the present study that some competing cultures and forms of rationality are in conflict with each other. These issues are important to this study because of the inter-play of cultural forces in the determination of educational knowledge in plural societies.

### 1) Marx's Social Determinist theory of Knowledge

The basis of the claims to the ideological nature of the curriculum is to be found in Marx's theory of social determination of knowledge. So I shall examine some aspects of that theory in detail. It will be carefully examined with a view to seeing if it provides an explanatory theory of the ideology of educational knowledge. If it is found to be sufficient to the present research, then attempts will be made to apply its central tenets to the analysis of the ideological nature of educational knowledge in the socio-political circumstances of Nigeria.

Karl Mannheim's theory of '*Wissensoziologie*' and his accounts of the "free-floating intelligentsia" will be considered in a postscript to the chapter on Marx's social determinist theory of knowledge (5: 111 - 15).

I shall contend that the social determinist theories of Marx and Mannheim have deficiencies which stand in the way of their providing a convincing account of the ideology of educational knowledge. Consequently it will be necessary to develop an alternative account which will be grounded in another of Marx's writings.

### 2) Consequences of the Explanatory Theory

I shall seek to examine critically the limitations and possible criticisms of the explanatory theory of the ideology of educational knowledge I finally offer. But I hold that, the explanatory theory of the ideology of educational knowledge that emerges from the present exercise, is only *a* theory and not *the* (definitive) theory of the ideology of educational knowledge. The interest in examining how it works in the Nigerian society and educational system does not preclude the possible universality of its assumptions and claims.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: HOLISTIC APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE**

#### **1 TOWARDS A METHODOLOGY**

The significance of any discourse is conditional upon a reference to the methodology that guides it. Any theory presupposes the application of a particular methodology. Claims, interpretations, methodologies and conclusions may be assessed by taking into consideration the particular theoretical framework which in the first place inform these. Having a clear methodology helps to avoid contradictory and inconsistent, invalid, generalised and perhaps dangerous claims or interpretations of the world. But it is not the case that, the presupposed methodology entails some canons which can be applied in their entirety. Methodologies are contestable in terms of the arguments they produce. What is implied by any particular methodology is open to disputes.

Each theoretical background makes its own basic assumptions, presuppositions, tools of analysis and mode of intellectual or philosophical practices. However, the identification of the appropriate metodological framework (in any discourse) does not solve an intellectual or a philosophical problem. The methodology only sets the basic parameters of the discussion, delineates the tools to be used, and defines the fundamental concerns for the resolution of the particular problem at stake. This holds for the philosophy of education as for any other subject of study because of the variety of theories that can be appealed to in analysing the problems with which it is concerned.

Certain philosophical and socio-methodological orientations have dominated discussions in the philosophy of education, and applied social theory. Amongst these are, 'progressivism', and 'conceptual analysis'. The former is usually identified with the American philosophical movement of 'pragmatism', ie of John Dewey and others. It

attempts to apply social and political philosophy, in addition to ethical and logical positions, to educational issues and problems. On the other hand, the Conceptual Analysis movement, heavily influenced by the Oxford linguistic philosophy of, for example, J. L. Austin and Gilbert Ryle, seeks to clarify certain conceptual confusions that bedevilled education. I intend to make some comments on this latter methodology as used in the philosophy of education since it has for the most part replaced the former theoretical and methodological assumptions of Anglo-Nigerian philosophy of education before 1960. What I shall call the 'analytical philosophy of education' following for example, Adelstein (1971) and Matthews (1980) has, it may be noted, itself been partly replaced in recent years; a good deal of its influence however remains. I shall attempt to examine the extent to which this methodology is relevant to the present study.

## **2 AN EXAMINATION OF THE ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION**

The analytical philosophy of education has been most fully developed in the writings of philosophers such as Peters and Hirst in the 1960s. Generally the analytical philosophy of education developed from that variety of linguistic philosophy (i. e. ordinary language philosophy) of Oxford in particular in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, especially the works of Austin and Ryle. Certain assumptions can be identified as providing the basic framework of the analytical philosophy of education. It is important to understand these basic presuppositions before coming to a view regarding the methodology's adequacy or otherwise for the purposes of the present study.

### **2.1 THE MAIN PRESUPPOSITIONS**

Although such premises are not spelt out in detail, they are, as Adelstein (1971) argued, identifiable. They are: firstly, a commitment to some kind of conceptual/linguistic analysis of educational issues, terms, and problems; secondly, the claim that philosophical investigation is essentially a 'second-order' activity,



distinguished from 'first order' activities such as science, history, economics and so on; thirdly the claim that philosophical analysis is a neutral and objective inquiry.

#### i Conceptual/Ordinary Language Analysis

The main consideration here is that concepts, unless clarified, constitute basic philosophical problems. Peters asserted that,

"we already know too much about human behaviour, albeit in a rather uncoordinated manner. Common sense incorporated in the concepts of ordinary language has creamed off most of the vital distinctions." (1958: 155)

The methods and strategies of linguistic analysis are employed in a bid to resolve confusion in the use of concepts. Concepts are first analysed by looking at the ordinary, 'normal', usage of words in order to establish what Gellner (1968) refers to as "paradigmatic usage". In this regard to ask for a definition of a word or term, is indeed to ask how that term or word is or ought to be used. Terminologies are explicated and by using the outcome of this exercise, a 'consensus', an 'agreement', over the usage of the concept/term, i. e. "the paradigmatic usage", is established. The idea of a paradigmatic case is rooted in the activities of the Oxford linguistic philosophy.

Adelstein claimed that, the paradigmatic usage is "highlighted by contrasting the use of the concept with the way it might normally be thought to be" (1971: 2). Synonyms are therefore offered and justified as explanations of a concept. But terms which, as Adelstein said, "are not already inscribed in the concepts of ordinary language" (ibid: 3), have no place in this methodology. To this end the focus is on the clarification of those concepts and terms that we already know, so that we shall have, in the words of Hirst and Peters "the ability to discriminate and use words correctly, which is observable in the case of others as well as ourselves" (1970: 4). The goal is generally to clarify conceptual confusions in the discussions and debates about education. In the

words of Peters philosophical inquiry is basically "the clarification and discussion of the concepts used and of how they have meaning" (1966: 16).

Matthews sums up this presupposition of the analytical philosophy of education. He argues that what constitutes the basic framework here is, the

"analysis of concepts in educational discourse, the determination of the 'logic' of the educational judgement and the justification of varied educational practices" (1980: 158).

The 'logical truth' that this system of philosophical analysis always seeks, as noted by Evers is the truth "in virtue of meaning, where meaning is filled out by considerations of usage" (1980: 14). For many Oxford philosophers of the 1950s and 1960s meaning is use.

#### i Philosophy as A Second-Order Inquiry

Warnock argued that "the facts, phenomena, cases or events to which .... concepts might be applied" (1958: 167), are the main business of philosophical investigation. The facts, phenomena, cases, and events belong to "first-order" inquiry or 'scientific investigations. Peters accordingly provided a distinction between the philosophical and the scientific areas of knowledge in order to clarify the purposes of philosophical investigations when he argued that,

"a scientific question ..... is one that can, in principle, be answered by certain kinds of procedures in which observation and experimentation play a crucial part. But the clarification and discussion of concepts and how they have meaning, and of the procedures by means of which these questions are answered, is a philosophical inquiry." (1966: 15)

The former are 'the first order' questions (science, history, and so on), while the latter comprise "the second order" areas of inquiry. Philosophy of Education is a 'second-order discipline' which is limited to conceptual questions and the difficulties that these highlight. These are difficulties which Ryan argued, require "an account of the proper things to say ..... and how we should conceive of them" (1970: 5). So Philosophy of

Education has as its concern, concepts and their interrelationships. Peters holds accordingly that,

"to distinguish logically necessary conditions of usage of words from other sorts of conditions that may be present ..... is to understand the difference between philosophy and doing science". (1966: 5)

The distinction between what is philosophical and what is not, is therefore basic. Accordingly philosophical analysis should deal only with the analysis of concepts and such analyses are to be found only in the second order areas of inquiry. Contexts of, and relations between the use of concepts are given less consideration in the analytic philosophy of education. While social contexts in which words are used, are given little attention in the analysis of concepts, considerable emphasis is given on linguistic analysis of those concepts under investigation. An inter-disciplinary approach to philosophical discourse is not tolerated by the methodology in question.

### iii Claims to neutrality/objectivity

The claim that philosophy is a neutral and objective inquiry is another presupposition of the methodology under consideration. It claims to offer a 'neutral' analysis of educational problems, by suggesting that it operates from a detached perspective, devoid of any commitment to ethical, political, ideological or any other forms of bias. It claims to direct its analysis of education towards nothing else than 'conceptual truths' in whatever way these appear, without regard to politics, culture, ideology and so on.

The philosophical framework under discussion implicitly acknowledges that philosophical questions do not arise in a vacuum, at least in the sense that its analysis lays stress on normal, ordinary usages of concepts and the words which express them. The analytical procedures suggest a kind of relationship between concepts and society. Nonetheless, it normally does not take as significant the social theory which is implied in its presentations of normal and ordinary usage of concepts.

The three presuppositions (conceptual analysis, the first/second order distinction, and the claim to objectivity) taken together constitute the basic methodological framework of the analytical philosophy of education. It is by means of this methodology that investigations of educational problems are reduced to the analysis of concepts such as 'teaching', 'learning', 'education', 'knowledge', and so on. So each concept is treated as an independent linguistic unit, the meaning of which can be revealed by analysing its internal logical structure. But the relationship between the concepts so analysed (the idea of a conceptual framework), is central to Oxford analytic philosophy.

## 2.2 SOME PROBLEMS FOR THE ANALYTIC METHODOLOGY

### i Meaning and truth

There is contained in the analytical philosophy of education, an attempt to relegate the task of philosophy from 'the search for truth' to 'the search for meaning' and define meaning as use. It is a mistake to conceive of truth in terms of meaning. Though analysing and determining meaning is a presupposition of the search for truth, the latter is not reducible to the former. Even if the correct meaning of a term is identified, the search for truth cannot be said to be satisfied until wider questions to do with context and time of usage are asked and answered.

The analytical philosophy of education does not, in most cases, provide something like dictionary meanings. Rather, by means of the analysis of sentences in which terms occur, it seeks to provide the logical and necessary conditions for the usage of a term. It seeks to determine the conditions for the truth of p (where p is a proposition). It seeks to determine the conditions under which the statement 'X knows that p' is true, in order to determine the meaning of the word knowledge. But determining the meaning of the word 'knowledge' will not of itself, help with the solutions of the epistemological problems which have traditionally troubled philosophers, such as the the problems of 'memory' and 'perception'. The mistake of the analytic philosophy of

education movement was to elevate conceptual analysis to the canonical procedure of philosophy in dealing with educational problems. It has, as I have indicated, a subsidiary though important role to play. Attaining conceptual clarity is important to exploring philosophical problems but it will not take us on the full journey.

Similarly the world is not reducible to conceptual classifications needing clarification, even though concepts are important for categorising human experiences and for articulating thoughts about the world. Despite the fact that most, if not all, philosophical inquiries involve some conceptual analysis, at one stage or the other, there is much more to philosophy than such analysis. The analysis of concepts is necessary to the resolution of philosophical problem; it is not, however, sufficient to their resolution.

## ii Confusion in the use of concepts

The analytical philosophy of education justifies itself mainly in terms of the clarification of conceptual confusion that afflicts debate in education. But it fails its own test by being unclear about 'confusion'. It seems to be itself confused about the concept of 'confusion'. It takes the concept for granted by saying nothing about what amounts to a 'confusion'. As Korner argues "we might have suspected confusion where there is none", especially since tracing a confusion is possible only "after we have gone through the rigours of analysis". (1969: 28) It is sufficient to suggest therefore that the analytical philosophy of education's claim that there is confusion in specific cases may not necessarily be true. The alleged confusion might just be a product of its adherence to a specific linguistic context, and a failure to recognise the socio-linguistic dimensions of the use of concepts.

It is one thing to claim a confusion in the use of concepts but it is another thing to demonstrate that certain usages actually amount to confusion. We have got to be clear about what it is in the use of a concept which amounts to the claimed confusion.

It needs to be stated clearly whose normal usage it accepts as a standard. Deviations from the standard can then be judged. This demand is important in the light of the relationships between language, culture and other variables like stratification factors found even in one linguistic community. The methodology does not demonstrate, it only assumes that there is no linkage between language and society. Consensus on normal usage, the departure from which will constitute wrong usage or even confusion (if properly defined for practical purposes), can only succeed if it is proved that language (and its concepts) can be detached from the nature and form of a society.

Standard uses of conceptual analysis, as a philosophical position rather than a philosophical procedure have attempted to universalise English usage and so detect confusions thereby reducing the possibility of cross-cultural usage of concepts. Such a position involves a disregard of different though related uses of particular concepts both within and between societies and sub-groups within a society.

### iii Problems of Analysis

There are many well - canvassed problems about the analytic procedure and I shall not discuss these. In particular the analytic philosophy of education generates problems of regression. It seeks to analyse a given concept in terms of its relation to the established usage of other concepts. If these concepts are further unanalysed the regression continues. If however those concepts are unanalysed the analysis of the original concept is without a foundation in the analytic procedure. One analysis entails another one similar to the 'initial subject' of investigation, such that no progress is made towards understanding the concept being investigated. As a result of this, other difficulties than those already mentioned bedevil the search for the meaning of the individual terms and the sentences in which they occur. As Quine argued,

"Analyticity at first seemed most naturally definable by appeal to a realm of meanings. On refinement, the appeal to meanings gave way to

synonymy or definition. But definition ..... and synonymy turned out to be best understood only by dint of a prior appeal to analyticity itself." (1953: 32)

This regression is damaging because it 'leaves all the problems as they were - unresolved'. There is little wonder therefore that the methodology tends to end up in even more intractable problems than the ones with which it started, and goes round in a circle.

#### iv Individual Units of Analysis

Analytic philosophy treats concepts as individual units which are expressed by the words of a sentence. For example, concepts like 'training', are frequently analysed without any reference to the properties of the sentence in which they are employed. Rather the individual, internal qualities of the concepts are analysed. However words and concepts, are basically understood and examined in specific contexts. They are contextually definable. Their meanings are obtained in the light of, being part of a theoretical system. As Popper (1972) holds, even 'facts' are themselves 'theory-laden' i.e. they gain their meaning and significance from the theory in which they are encased. There is thus, a 'theory' be it 'primitive' or highly developed behind our observations, our statements about the world, and our claims to reality.

This theory about a set of general ideas is ignored by analytic philosophy of education in its preoccupation with individual units of analysis. There is a problem in this approach because as both Quine and Popper suggest, in order to be relevant or meaningful, the individual units must be seen in their relations to each other within the context of their usage. Analytical philosophy of education would therefore do well to take seriously Korner's observation that, "every concept is part of a complex network of concepts from which it cannot be isolated" (1969: 27). Korner's claim shows that the context of the language itself is important in understanding the meaning of its individual terms and concepts.

## V Problems about neutrality and objectivity

There are serious doubts that the methods of the analytic philosophy of education are both objective and neutral. It cannot be accepted that analytic philosophy of education can attain the position of objectivity and neutrality without argument, and the difficulties of arguing from 'Archimedian position' are well known (for example, Winch: 1958). It has to be demonstrated that subjective issues, (i.e. the so-called second-order areas of inquiry including philosophy) can be discussed from a socially, culturally, and historically detached position. In so far as the Archimedian position is not tenable (and I am assuming it is not), it can be argued that, every spectator, is a participant because he/she has an interest in whatever is going on even if he/she may either not be willing or is unable to say or show it, or even if he/she is constrained in such a way that the person hardly becomes aware of that interest. It seems that it is this concealed interest which to some extent determines his satisfaction or otherwise with the proceedings that, it is claimed, he watches "detachedly". There is nothing inherent to analytic philosophy of education from which it follows that, the outcomes of its exercise, are other than subjective, i.e. reflections of the preoccupations of individual analysts.

## 2.3 TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE

Having examined some of the problems of the analytical philosophy of education, I conclude that it is not appropriate to the present study. Hence an alternative theoretical framework to guide this work is required.

The analytical philosophy of education is a reductionist approach to philosophy in general, and investigations of educational knowledge in particular. Thus far it has been shown that the methodology in question restricts itself to exhibiting the meaning of what is already known, or indeed what is taken for granted as known. Therefore by the very nature of the presuppositions which define its general framework, the



methodology in question appears to have some in-built, inherent limitations in analysing 'new' concepts or terms. I suggest that 'educational knowledge' is an example of such terms that cannot be fully accounted for by this theoretical framework, because of - among other reasons - the exhibitionist character of the methodology in question. 'Educational knowledge' is a term peculiar to philosophy, and is, I shall claim, thus beyond the parameters of the analytical philosophy of education which deals only with those concepts already in use. The best that such a methodology can offer in this regard is the linguistic analysis of concepts.

It follows therefore that an explanation is to be sought in an alternative approach to knowledge. The elements of the alternative I shall propose have already been hinted at in the critique of the methodology in question. For the purposes of understanding and discussing the term 'educational knowledge' and this study in general, a 'holistic theory of explanation' (mild holism) as an approach to knowledge is hereby proposed.

### **3 HOLISTIC THEORY**

#### **3.1 QUINE'S HOLISM**

Quine (1953, 1988) criticises ordinary language philosophy's use of the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements in its search for a theory of meaning. Empiricism, according to Quine "cannot have such a distinction". He argued that, "synthetic sentences for the most part have empirical content only jointly as interlocking systems of sentences" (1988: 3). Quine makes holism the basis of a positivist theory of meaning. He claims that, "each term owes its meaning in relation with the others, so that they are all more or less closely inter-defined." (ibid: 3) Furthermore, holism holds that, "evidence can confirm only a whole theory, not an individual sentence" (ibid), unit of a sentence, or a single and isolated term or concept expressed by such a term. So contrary to the claims and presuppositions of the analytical philosophy of education, explanations and the search for meanings (of terms, concepts, and so on) must not be situated in isolated, detached terms and concepts. Holism also

entails some recognition of the contexts in which concepts are used, in which the radical empiricism of Quine is not necessarily interested. But what is important here is that, meaning is necessarily holistic. It seems therefore that holism as a theory of meaning and social explanation, should be the framework for the discussion of the issues and problems of the present study. But whether or not Quine's holism is to be accepted is another issue.

Quine's holism is, it is noted, held jointly with positivism, a philosophical tradition which denies intentionality to human beings, and accordingly holds a positivistic view of both the Natural and the Social Sciences. It might seem that adopting a Quinean holism would lead straight into a 'Wittgensteinian' and 'Winchian' relativism, and the view of the Social Sciences as interpretive. The latter approaches are equally holistic for they look for the significance of beliefs in terms of social wholes, for example, cultures, societies, historical epochs and so on. They are not, by that token, restricted to offering causal explanations and clarifications of meanings as does the positivist approach. I shall therefore detach holism from the positivist context in which Quine develops and envelops it.

### 3.2 SOCIAL HOLISM AS AN EXPLANATORY TOOL

The theory of holistic explanations described above features in the Social Sciences much as it does in philosophical investigations. Holistic explanations are characterised by a priori principles, theoretical under-pinnings, and an appeal to the relationships between complexities within (and without) phenomena. Holistic explanations are thus theory-laden since, in the words of Peacocke (1979), they have a sort of "governing ideal". No fact or proposition is located outside the realm of theory. All facts are theory-laden since they are inter-defined as Popper (1972) suggested. Observational elements are established by theory. Theory determines the selection, ordering and meaning of the facts. Facts can only be determined by means of processes of identification, perception and interpretation, otherwise they cannot be known. For

example, in observations, only those things of interest which assist in explaining the basic research questions or hypotheses, and so on, are focused. If a fact can be known outside a context, then it will probably be irrelevant to any rational project. As Harris suggested, knowing the world involves a subject (the knower) and an object (the world to be known or discovered). The two must interact for knowledge to be generated. So one cannot have knowledge from some logical position outside that of the world and people, because "the world is the context for existing and for knowing" (1979: 4). It is in this regard that "we select particular 'facts' out of an infinite multitude, and order and categorise what we select..." (ibid: 32). This also implies the social dimension of the search for meanings and explanations of phenomena. The holistic theory holds that philosophical as well as other investigations are necessarily social. Phenomena in their final analyses are meaningful only in relation to society.

Ryan (1970), Feyerabend (1978), James (1984), among others, all advocate one form of holism or other as a theory of social explanation. All are united in insisting that explanations and meanings are understood by reference to the properties of collectives, and that actions are understood only "in terms of the logic of the situation". Waismann (1968) further indicates that, holistic explanations assess or search for meanings within a context, and not in isolation. Context therefore is crucial to meaning, and offering explanations of social phenomena, general behaviours and conducts of social actors. James sums up this basic quality of holism as

"the view that social phenomena are to be explained by appealing primarily to the properties of social wholes, since the latter are causal factors which shape the characteristics of individual members of a society."  
(1984: 79)

This stands in sharp contrast to "methodological individualism" a theory in the Social Sciences of parallel standing with the analytical philosophy of education. Both give priority in their analytical schemes to the units and individual members of the social whole.

The Marxist paradigm, in a modified form, will be used as a reference point in this study for the reasons that, *firstly*, it is comprehensive and holistic, though this must not be taken to presuppose that it is satisfactory. However, having adopted holism as the basic methodology for this study, there is a corresponding demand for the choice of an equally holistic paradigm to match. This demand is met much more strongly by the Marxist theory than its positivist (functionalist) counterpart. *Secondly*, holism provides stronger grounds for an account of the growth of knowledge than does the positivist theory. It has a comparably rich intellectual tradition which it had generated, and continues to generate over the last one hundred years. *Thirdly*, it has dominated the debates on ideology in contemporary philosophy and sociology of knowledge such that those debates are always considered incomplete without a reference to it. *Fourthly*, Marxist and neo-Marxist theories of history and society have provided the bases for theories of ‘social epistemology’, within which debates over the questions of the nature and problems of knowledge, including educational knowledge are often located. Even the positivist sociology of knowledge starts off from the Marxist claims to a theory of knowledge production. Considerations of the Marxist paradigm are therefore central to the methodological and other concerns of this study.

### 3.3 SOME ADVANTAGES OF THE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE

First, the holistic approach to knowledge provides a wider perspective for the understanding of human knowledge than does the positivist approach. It will be seen that it facilitates an understanding not only of the specific internal structure of a phenomena (a term, a concept, an issue, or a proposition), but also its background, purposes, production, expression, and interpretation. Terms or concepts are analysed in relation to their complexities, i.e. their specific contexts and interrelationships by means of which they are jointly inter-defined.

Second, the holistic approach to knowledge, contrary to the analytical philosophy of education’s project of concentrating on the purely philosophical questions (i.e., what is

called "second-order" inquiry), draws from the social sciences, social theory, and other disciplines relevant to the present study. The distinction between the scientific and the philosophical is, for holism, very thin indeed, so that there is no denial of the relevance of either, which means that the elements of either or both can be employed in an analysis of educational knowledge.

Third, the holistic methodology has the advantage that it does not stop at the level of clarifying meaning or confusion in the use of concepts. It does not only 'talk to' the problem, but it attempts to answer the deeper social and philosophical problems involved. In its attempt to achieve understanding the holistic methodology extends the search from the logical structure of a concept, to its place and function in a social whole. Above all it uses the meaning it arrives at, as an introduction to the discussion of the problems of the social phenomena in question; meaning is only taken provisionally. In so doing it allows for the growth of knowledge because it leaves all options and possibilities open.

Fourth, holism possesses the analytical tools necessary for the consideration of new terms and concepts. It therefore transcends the analytical philosophy of education, by virtue of being a theory which goes beyond, mere conceptual analysis. An holistic approach to knowledge also allows for an analysis of knowledge and knowledge claims in relation to the main concerns and purposes of ideological interpretations. Ideas of relevance to both educational knowledge and ideology, as well as the relationship between them, can then be examined much more deeply than would be possible by a reliance on conceptual analysis alone. In the process the social complexities of educational knowledge and ideology (or social theory in general) are opened up for discussion. The interrelationships between social phenomena are accordingly taken as crucial to an understanding of the particular social phenomena in question. The social networks on which society thrives are central pillars of the holistic approach to educational knowledge.

The analysis of the term 'educational knowledge' and the subsequent study of this dissertation are therefore best pursued within a holistic context. The holistic methodology will therefore be employed in this research rather than the methodology of the analytical philosophy of education. Having arrived at such a methodological stance I shall, in the next chapter, specify the use in this study, of the term 'educational knowledge', as distinct from 'knowledge' per se.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **TOWARDS AN INTERPRETATION OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

#### **1 KNOWLEDGE, EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

It is central to the holistic approach to knowledge (1: 9 - 22), that the concept of knowledge is incomprehensible unless it is situated in relation to other properties of the world. It must be seen within a specific context. Hence, I refer here to 'educational knowledge' rather than 'knowledge'. But 'educational knowledge' is a fairly new term in the philosophy of education. It is a term which has inclinations towards the Sociology of Knowledge rather than Classical Epistemology. There is therefore the need to understand what it is and its implications.

But can knowledge be qualified as 'educational'? The main disposition in this study is to do more with the 'source' rather than, exclusively, the 'nature' of knowledge. But this claim does not dismiss the attempt to understand the nature of knowledge. On the contrary, the latter is to be used as a launching-pad, as the very first premise for understanding 'educational knowledge'.

Following the holistic methodology, 'knowledge' and 'knowledge claims' are to be considered in the light of 'an educational system', which in turn is located within, and expressed by, a larger context. The idea of holism contained in this approach to knowledge, is enticing. It allows for the consideration of larger issues surrounding knowledge and knowledge claims. For example, paying attention to the framework of an 'educational system' implies the presence and relevance of public criteria, a standard of rationality, and above all a form of society. All of these are required as criteria for assessment of, and discourse about, educational knowledge.

To qualify knowledge as educational implies at the same time, some ‘non-educational knowledge’. So the adjective ‘educational’, appears to be an attribute of ‘knowledge’. Hence the need to search for the force of the term ‘educational’ knowledge understood as a qualifier, identified in what is considered educational about knowledge or even knowledge claims. So going by the principles of replacement analysis (Introduction: 6), and without prejudice to the holism of the present study, it is important, for the purpose of interpreting and understanding the idea of ‘educational knowledge’, to come to a view about the nature of knowledge claims.

## **2 THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE AND ITS EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS**

### **2.1 BASIC QUESTIONS**

Without prejudice to some of the issues raised earlier, an examination of standard analyses of ‘knowledge’ as such, is important in the attempt to identify the specific conditions that obtain when we talk of ‘knowledge’. It is relevant to this study for at least the following reasons:-

- i) knowledge (though not knowledge per se) is central to the task in this study;
- ii) there is a need to identify or distinguish ‘knowledge’ from ‘non-knowledge’ in order to be able to recognise failed claims to knowledge which may on the face-value appear to us as knowledge.
- iii) I need to justify the basis of claims to knowledge within the specific context with which this study is concerned;

It is worth stressing at this juncture that, the discussion of the various attempts to interpret knowledge is only conducted in the interest of understanding what is involved in, and what is special to, the qualification ‘educational’. I am interested in discussing the problems raised in debates over the nature of knowledge only because of its relevance to arriving at a plausible interpretation of the term.



‘educational knowledge’. So very large areas of traditional interest in epistemology will be left unexamined.

## 2.2 THE CLASSICAL DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE

Plato’s Theatetus, Meno, and Republic, laid the foundation of the dominant approach used by generations of philosophers when analysing the nature of knowledge. That descriptive tradition has, as its central strand, the attempt to discover the necessary and sufficient conditions that hold when somebody claims to know ‘that p’, (where p is a proposition). A proposition is here taken to mean,

"whatever can be asserted, denied, contended, maintained, assumed, supposed, implied or presupposed. In other words, it is that which is expressed by a typical indicative sentence". (Flew: 1984: 290)

Knowledge is one of many propositional attitudes. Others include belief, doubt, hope, expectation and certainty. The inquiry about the nature of knowledge has been narrowed to the question: what is entailed by the claim that ‘X knows that p’? So the basic analysandum (i.e., the unit of analysis) here is the knowing of a proposition. Can knowledge be analysed only in terms of knowing a proposition? There are of course, in the attempts to say or determine what amounts to knowing a proposition, many difficulties. The main problems are the conditions and scope of knowledge, and those of its relation to other epistemic terms such as belief, reason, truth, and so on.

### i The Platonic/Classical Analysis

In the Theatetus Plato’s analysis of knowledge is said to imply that, if someone knows that p, it is the case that p. The dialogue culminates in the view that knowledge is "a true belief with a *logos*" (an account). This position can be represented as follows: ‘X knows that p’ iff:-

- i) p is true,
- ii) X believes that p,

iii) X is justified in believing that p.

The Platonic analysis of the nature of knowledge has greatly influenced contemporary philosophers.

Many queries may however be raised over the Platonic treatment of knowledge and knowledge claims. For example the relationship between belief and truth (conditions i and ii) has been much discussed; however at this stage it is less clear. It is important to have a clear view of the two basic epistemic terms contained in the Platonic analysis, belief and truth, as well as the relationship between them.

The third condition presupposes that an account of justification (can be provided), i.e. it implies some sort of knowledge of the rationality criterion used in assessing whether or not 'X knows that p'. Such a justification entails some a-priori knowledge of the standards involved in judging knowledge and knowledge claims. There is clearly the danger of a regress here. As argued by Walker and Evers (1982), an infinite regress occurs: that X requires justification for believing p (as a condition of knowledge) itself requires justification. If in an attempt to say what knowledge or knowledge claims amount to, we have necessarily to employ certain a-priori categories, then it seems that, those categories will themselves require some explanation and justification. This means that, for one to be able to answer the question or even start the discussion one will need to explain the a-priori categories involved in the judgement about the standards of rationality which feature in that claim. As a result of such a regression the basic problem with which we are most concerned remains unresolved because there are always demands on us to make clear those a-priori categories that are implied by the third condition of the classical position.

Another problem with the classical position is that which is imposed by the relationship of historical considerations to the ideas of 'truth', 'belief' and 'justification'. To judge that 'X knows that p', involves knowledge of the possibilities of rationality available to X, at time t, and these possibilities have every probability of changing at other times, for example at time t1. The standards of rationality on which we rely in our assessment of knowledge and knowledge claims, may themselves change over a period of time. That being so, when faced with wider possibilities for the interpretation of 'rationality' our interpretation of knowledge, and our justifications for such, are equally likely to change. But as these changes occur our allegedly true and justified beliefs cannot be considered without further examination as 'knowledge' any more. As our possibilities widen, our claims to knowledge equally change, because new and wider possibilities, and, so, rationality options may negate, and so invalidate X's earlier claims to knowledge. That is because the beliefs involved may, as a result of such changes be no longer justified. The grounds for knowledge become thus defeated and so the standards of rationality employed themselves stand in need of modification(s).

The Platonic position however might be defended by the argument that, though some knowledge is presupposed by its analysis, it is not propositional knowledge. It is the knowledge of, for example, standards of rationality which are presupposed by the justifications which are offered for that particular claim to knowledge that p. However this argument is not successful because the central argument in the analysis, leads to, as argued earlier, regression and circularity. The counter-argument produced here has not however, altered, or resolved these issues. The regression that is involved remains: if X believes 'that p', there has to be a good reason R, a justification for X's so believing, which itself contains a knowledge claim. Unless these problems can be overcome, the classical position stands in need of modification.

The issues raised in the Platonic analysis of 'knowledge that' have continued to exercise philosophers. No epistemological interest can ignore these. Nonetheless it is not the focal point of my discussion partly because of what I have already said and my interest will be in only one aspect of the analysis: rationality. And I will be discussing this in a context which serves the purposes other than the purely analytic approach. The central concern will be with an holistic approach which I believe to be most important to an analysis of 'educational knowledge'.

The epistemological tradition briefly described above has an essentially individualistic and analytic interest. Knowledge claims are basically assessed in terms of claims to knowing a single proposition, 'p', rather than knowing bodies of propositions. It is implicit in the Platonic analysis that it does not matter whether or not one sees those necessary and sufficient conditions applying in respect to a class of propositions or a single proposition. What applies to knowing a single proposition equally works for a body of propositions particularly since the latter is, but a collection of the former. This brings out the individualistic approach to knowledge: that the whole is best understood by examining its constituent units. One implication of my rejection of that method is that, as I shall argue, knowledge, and by extension educational knowledge, is best understood in an holistic sense, as a body of propositions within a specifiable context.

One consequence of the holistic approach to knowledge is that emphasis will be placed on the relationship between epistemic terms such as beliefs, reasons, evidence, rationality, and so on, on the one hand, and their socio-political contexts, on the other hand.

The frameworks of the analytical philosophy of education, from which perspectives the debates on the nature of knowledge have for the most part taken place, are, because of their methodological preoccupation with individual propositions, unable to explain and clarify the central, holistic, features of educational knowledge. Analysis of individual propositions in the tradition of the preoccupations of the Theatatus, is a necessary condition of the clarification of educational knowledge, but not however sufficient.

The idea of knowledge entails, not only epistemic qualities or terms, but relationships between them. Fundamentally, the linguistic analysis movement has treated knowledge as a 'micro', as opposed to a 'macro' concept. It has been less successful in saying what knowledge is, than it has been in exploring the conditions under which it is true that 'X knows that p'. So its analyses are inadequate to the project of understanding, the socio-epistemological contexts in which bodies of (interalia) knowledge claims are legitimated, transmitted, acquired, and possessed of a wide socio-political significance.

I shall now proceed to the interpretation of educational knowledge, in an holistic sense, and place greater emphasis upon the sources of, rather than the conditions for, knowledge. Certain of the preoccupation of the epistemological individualism of the analytic school will remain, only, however, to be considered in the changed context of an holistic approach to the nature of educational knowledge.

### **3 EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

#### **3.1 THE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

The holistic approach to knowledge that I employ here, allows for the use of the epistemic terms already identified as necessary to the analysis of 'knowledge' *sans phrase*. The chief concern here is the extent to which those epistemic terms

are understood jointly, and not independently, i.e., as constituents of a system. So one does not understand the term 'knowledge' if the relevant epistemic terms are taken singularly, in isolation from the rest. They have to be seen to be working within a coherent system of inter-relationships. The meaning of any single term depends on a whole body of terms and the propositions in which they are used. Accordingly the holistic approach to knowledge is grounded on a macro, not micro, account so that knowledge implies a body of propositions with its own internal characteristics: coherence and consistency, methodology or explanatory/predictive power, which taken together make statements about the world.

### 3.2 EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE: SOME BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

It is fundamental that educational knowledge be seen as a socially organized curriculum knowledge as Young (1971) and others did. It has to be understood by reference to the properties of the social totality. It is worth stressing in this regard that the holistic approach to knowledge gives priority to a context that is always determined ahead of discussions about knowledge or education. The holistic approach therefore requires that educational knowledge be discussed within a specified context: cultural, economic, political or historical or a combination of these.

For the purposes of the present study, the first context to be considered is that of *an educational system*. But a closer look at this context shows an even more crucial context, the society within which the educational system itself is located. Societies vary with respect to all those features which together constitute a culture. The relationship between education and society is thus basically relativistic and holistic. Educational knowledge manifests itself in relation to the nature of the society in question. In essence therefore the holistic approach

suggests different accounts of the forms that educational knowledge takes, even though its essential characteristics are universal.

If knowledge is to be qualified as 'educational', as in the present study, certain special criteria are required. 'Educational knowledge' is employed in this study to refer to that which is taught in the formal school (classroom) setting within the frameworks of the educational system that is in place in a given society, at a given time. It may be seen as the content of instruction which is to be located in the academic subject-offerings: the syllabii and their specified goals and objectives, the topics and the purposes and reasons for teaching them, as well as the approved ('authoritative') back-up sources like textbooks and reference materials by means of which the import and logic of that which is transmitted is reinforced.

As expressing the officially approved views of reality, educational knowledge functions as a codified frame of reference, the essential guide for teaching, instruction and learning within the confines of the formal school setting. It provides for those specific elements of knowledge considered worthwhile for transmission to the up-coming generations in a society. It has a definite relationship with the prevailing goals and objectives of a society. As the social goals change educational knowledge and its goals respond accordingly. Educational knowledge is of its nature dynamic.

Some of what I shall say in this dissertation about ideology of educational knowledge does not apply with equal force to possible non-centralised educational systems where there might be considerable school-based curriculum development. School-based curriculum development programmes are different because the school, for example, in the pre-National Curriculum England have some autonomy in this matter. There are, under school-based curriculum

development arrangements, no single set of objectives across the board which all schools must follow. The inspectors of education only advise schools pertaining to curriculum content. There is thus no uniformity. This thesis is concerned only with systems in which the curriculum is centrally controlled.

Within such systems, educational knowledge makes both its transmitters and receivers passive agents. The teachers, who are the transmitters, are made passive in their role vis-a-vis the teaching of only that which is officially approved. They cannot, by law, go beyond that. They have therefore no powers of innovation in respect of determining what they deem fit for the pupils to know, or be taught. They are essentially passive transmitters of the official views of reality expressed and codified into subjects of study and broken down into appropriate syllabii, topics, and so on. They are expected to contribute towards the achievement of the pre-specified objectives. Similar expectation is placed on the pupils although they are supposed to be transformed into active human subjects in relation to the realisation of the designed objectives. Thus, they passively consume or internalise whatever is taught to them. They have no choice over what they teach or are taught. The intention however is that they will, through what they learn, actively engage themselves in the attempt to achieve the set goals and objectives. The pupils are equipped by means of educational knowledge, with the wherewithal for realising the aims of the general package.

The idea of educational knowledge raises problems of the freedoms that might be, but are not open to planners, transmitters and receivers. All of these are faced with ideologically significant options. The planners have large areas of knowledge and skills within which to discriminate and determine what they consider fit for transmission, but always in relation to the overall programmes or total curricular packages handed down to them by the state. The transmitters have problems with constraints and limitations to their professional skills as well



as their political or moral awareness or both. The pupils's interests are either disregarded or assumed in advance before they are ever educated. Their freedom of choice of what to study is curtailed by the assumption that, they are ignorant, and so do not even know the possible range of options from which to make a rational choice.

### 3.3 SOME CRITERIA FOR THE DEFINITION OF 'EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE'.

#### i Context: An Educational System Is Within A Society.

The first minimal demand here is a context. I have already argued that, the context for educational knowledge is a formal educational system. What I have in mind here is both the formal state bureaucracy that manages and oversees education on behalf of the society, and the hierarchically graded schooling system from the pre-primary up to the university levels. Institutional structures like government departments such as a 'Ministry of Education' and its various organs and extra-ministerial bodies are integral to the business of educational knowledge production. These play a crucial role in the selection and dissemination of educational knowledge.

The schooling context is another necessary institutional context for the production and transmission of educational knowledge. Whatever is designed and selected as educational knowledge is, in the final analysis, to be transmitted within the school. The school is therefore the most important institution in the dissemination of the educational knowledge. This institution is central because of the way it is organized and the systematic way in which it executes the tasks of the transmission of educational knowledge. It is organized in graded hierarchies (for example, classes and streams) which make dissemination both purposeful, and therefore goal-directed, and easier of control. Control is exercised by means of rules such for example that, promotion and success depends to a large extent

on the mastery of what has been taught to the pupils. Accordingly the school socializes pupils systematically into the culture of the society and, in particular, its cultural knowledge. Because of the vital role which the school plays in the dissemination of 'educational knowledge', the term cannot be properly understood, except by reference to the school's wider context.

An educational system does not exist in a social, political, economic and historical vacuum. It can only obtain in a society. It is in the process of man's attempt to make sense of his social living that knowledge becomes differentiated and sorted out on the basis of man's priorities, goals, objectives and aspirations. Some knowledge is always presupposed by any particular way of living. It is necessary both to have descriptions of the physical and social worlds and to generalise these descriptions in order to survive in the world. Society (within which an educational system exists and finds meaning) has priority as the most basic context for educational knowledge.

The society is the totality of the complex social relationships among people in their attempt at producing and reproducing their life-processes. It is these relationships which combine to give each society within history its specific form and nature. But the nature and form of each society is relative to its level of development. By the 'nature' of society I mean the conceptions of its essence and goals, while by 'form' I mean the singular characteristics of each society within history. Both the nature and form of each society and its historical variables play a crucial role in the production and distribution of knowledge, especially valued knowledge. Both determine how common knowledge is transformed into non-common knowledge, in terms of which educational knowledge is to be preserved, promoted and transmitted within its system for the dissemination of ideas, views, and claims to reality. Thus interests (which I shall discuss later: 3: 65 - 8) play a very prominent role in the task of the production of educational knowledge. This

consideration will be seen to be of central relevance in the discussion of the production of educational knowledge in pluralistic societies.

### ii Selection and Legitimation

Valued knowledge for transmission in schools is always selected from a mass of possible candidates. It is just not every proposition about the world that is officially considered worthy of transmission in schools. There are at least two reasons for this: One, it simply is not possible to select and teach all known propositions about the world. Two, such a thing is not even desirable, because each set of bodies of knowledge must have some role to play in relation to the basic goals and aspirations of 'the society' in question. What follows therefore is the necessity for criteria for exclusion and inclusion of areas of knowledge in the educational knowledge of a society. Only those areas of knowledge which are deemed relevant to that society are identified, selected, approved, and transmitted in the schools. I elaborate on this aspect later (see 7: 130 - 37 and 8: 142 - 46).

The propositions about the world that comprise educational knowledge are so selected at the expense of others, and are sanctioned by the state. It is the selection by the state which confers some legitimacy on the officially defined knowledge, hence educational knowledge comes to be judged as valuable. Furthermore, the legitimation of educational knowledge is further supported by an authority which has been properly constituted to play that role. In this regard the government enforces what it sanctioned for transmission in the schools. So in addition to authority it requires compliance. This is done through its bureaucracy and machineries of the state. It authorises and sanctions, by for instance, political or legal instruments, such as legislation, policy directives, and so on. Thus the National Curriculum in England and Wales, is legitimated by 'the Education Reform Act of 1988'. I shall address the role of the state in the

production of educational knowledge as one aspect for explaining the ideological nature of educational knowledge in due course (7: 130 - 37 and 12: 209 - 17).

There is, in the efforts at the production of educational knowledge, a distinction between the true, justified and relevant, and false but relevant claims to the world on the one hand, and the true, justified but irrelevant claims to the world, and false and irrelevant on the other hand. The question of truth (as in the Platonic approach to knowledge) does not arise for the state as it does to the philosopher. Truth and falsity do not necessarily matter as far as the basic goals of the state are concerned. Relevance of the propositions so selected, or which have the potentials of being selected and transmitted, is not assessed on grounds of the truth or falsity of the contents of educational knowledge. Relevance or lack of it is measured in this regard by functionality. I shall develop this view later. Harris (1979), following Lakatos called the former (i.e. the selected bodies of educational knowledge irrespective of their truth content) "the received view" of the world.

The received view has a purpose and a commitment to the 'manifest' interests of 'the society' in which the process of selection and legitimation takes place. Note that, there may be a variety of such interests in a society. But only those which are dominant become aggregated and legitimated for the purposes of selection and legitimation of valued knowledge.

There is an important relationship between, the society's power structure (which defines both the relevant interests and their corresponding received views) and the production and legitimation of educational knowledge. Few, participate in the process of selecting valued knowledge. Only those social actors who occupy a privileged place in the society's power structure, acting on behalf of the society, carry out this task. Selection and legitimation of educational knowledge is

accomplished either directly or by means of delegation of responsibility and authority under strict rules and conditions. In the former case, the state designs the general guiding principles, the general aims and objectives deriving from its basic philosophy and fundamental "directive principles of state policy". These are to be fully followed in the latter case by the 'experts', 'the specialists', and 'professionals' under conditions of delegated responsibility, in selecting and designing those appropriate bodies of propositions about the world which are consistent with, and are deemed relevant to the achievement of the stated aims and policy directions of the state. I show later how this process works within the Nigerian educational system (see 12: 209 - 17). Hence the structure of power relations is indispensable to the determination of what should, and what should not count as worthy knowledge for the purposes of instruction. So all educational knowledge is officially selected, and sanctioned by the relevant organs in the society's power structure in line with what it has taken as entailing the interests of the society.

Exceptions would be school-based curriculum development projects, under which schools have some autonomy to select what they deem fit. But then even under such arrangements, the schools are institutions which are also located within the society's hierarchy or institutional framework. However apart from the school-based curriculum development programmes, states vary in the degree of specificity they enact, and of production of detailed texts for courses.

### iii The Syllabi, Topics and Lesson Contents

Educational knowledge is expressed in terms of distinctive patterns of instruction. These entail specified elements and mechanisms for the proper dissemination of knowledge for specific tasks and purposes. In concrete terms, these include 'lesson contents' which may be generally spelt out in a 'syllabus', or, more specifically, 'topics' for each lesson's focus. Textbooks are also relevant at

this point because they reinforce both the authority (of the state in the remote sense, and the teacher in the immediate sense) and the knowledge that is transmitted. They are either produced or selected to tally with the agreed syllabii, the full embodiment of educational knowledge. Textbooks are supposed, like all other elements of educational knowledge, to conform to the goals and objectives as well as the underlying principles which in the first place inform decisions about education in general, and educational knowledge in particular. It is more important however that, both syllabii and textbooks conform to the set standards and guide-lines of the official organs responsible for their design and evaluation. For example the certificate awarding bodies seek quality control by trying to ensure that there is conformity to the official views of the world as a condition for certification. All these elements are internally structured into coherent disciplines, usually referred to as 'subjects of study'. Each subject of study is centred on its own distinctive presuppositions, procedures and knowledge content.

#### iv The Specialists

Specialists or experts are also required for the determination and dissemination of educational knowledge. They may be designers or planners of the syllabii, topics, textbooks, and so on, or the teachers whose responsibilities come at the tail end of the production line. Both are united by their passivity and lack of initiative as their educational roles are determined by the enactments of the power group(s). They cannot go beyond those basic considerations. Although they may appear to be the masters of educational knowledge, they are, at a deeper level, alienated subjects, who are reduced to the position of subservience to the real masters: those who select, evaluate and enact official educational knowledge. This basic consideration is crucial to this research, as I shall argue later.

## v Purposes and Objectives

Items for inclusion as educational knowledge are deliberately selected to play a particular role in the realisation of the guiding principles and specific objectives of the state, or regime in power. The acquisition of educational knowledge is intended to work towards the achievement of given objectives and purposes. It is in regard to its commitment to the form of society in place at any particular time that educational knowledge acquires its meaning and relevance. It has a functional essence, in that it must be recoverable: i.e. productive in achieving the goals of the state, society or regime. In other words educational knowledge is central to the state apparatus because it has a potential impact on those who have acquired it. It is developed and systematised to ensure a long-lasting effect on the pupils so that they, by necessity not choice, work towards the desirable state of affairs taken to be immanent in successful learning. Educational knowledge is designed and transmitted in such a way that it is intended to bring about specific effects on the pupils.

The basic assumption thus made by the state in determining aims and objectives is that the mind exerts a great deal of influence over action. Hence the fashioning of the mind by the desired knowledge is assumed to have a crucial influence on human action. This of course raises issues in the philosophy of the mind and epistemology that I shall not pursue here. My concern here is only that of locating the ideological underpinning of knowledge when it is presented as 'educational', in terms of its recoverability: its potential for control (in an extreme sense) and influence of human action (in less ambitious sense). Not all of that which we learn has a large and lasting influence on our thinking and actions. Only certain propositions prove systematically dispensable in the sense of being recoverable. The recovery of educational knowledge is the means whereby learners are able to attain their ends - which are the ends of the state. It

is, so to speak, already designed to promote those projects of great value so deemed by the relevant society.

Following the above considerations, I shall for the purposes of this study, take educational knowledge to refer to, a body of propositions with its own internal characteristics: coherence and consistency, intellectual procedures, explanatory or predictive powers, which taken together make statements about the world. These are officially selected and sanctioned for transmission in the institutional context of an educational system, (specifically in the schools) with a view to bringing about certain effects for those who have been made to learn them.

#### **4 EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE CURRICULUM**

Much of what I shall suggest here is, but a layman's view of the curriculum. Educational knowledge is differentiated in the first place, from the curriculum, in respect of its specificity as against the wider, general view that the curriculum is the totality of educational practice and learning experiences in the school. The term 'educational knowledge' therefore, narrows the focus of the curriculum from its wider dimensions to its specifics: approved bodies of knowledge about the world (with their attendant qualities as identified here), the subject-offerings and their specific contents. That view of the curriculum with its emphasis on the psychology, and social psychology of learning, is broader in certain senses, than the sense of curriculum which is limited to its political, epistemological aspects, and with which I am here concerned. Educational knowledge covers the basic epistemic contents of both the 'syllabus' and the 'lesson'. So, in Kleinig's view of the syllabus:

"the syllabus is limited to an outline of the structure/content to be deliberately communicated within some 'subjects' (a number of which occupy an important place in the curriculum). Lessons are one means by which a syllabus may be implemented: the syllabus material is broken up into manageable portions for presentation by a teacher." (1982: 146)



While the term 'curriculum' comprises the totality of learning experiences in the school, educational knowledge concentrates on the content of instructions (beliefs, practices and so on) found in the syllabii and textbooks, in particular. The narrower conception of the methods and contents of teacher includes educational knowledge in addition to pedagogy (methodology for transmission of the valued knowledge) as well as evaluation of, and innovations in the learning experiences in the school. 'Educational knowledge' therefore is more specific and more readily identifiable than 'curriculum', which may include the hidden dimensions of learning experiences.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

It is in line with the holistic approach to knowledge that educational knowledge, is best analysed in relation to other epistemic terms or social phenomena. In this regard, one of the central features of educational knowledge is that, what counts as knowledge is a particular selection and organization from potentially available knowledge (Young: 1971). Educational knowledge is therefore a function of the social structure of a society. By virtue of being that, it proselytises one set of interpretations of the world (that is of course only one amongst many others). By extension, there is a close connection between social structure and the intentional reinforcement of political and social ideals. Such claims about the status of educational knowledge, I shall argue, are to be understood in ideological terms. The justification of such claims now requires a detailed examination of the ideas of 'ideology' and the 'ideology of educational knowledge'.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AN OUTLINE OF A THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

#### **1 SOME APPROACHES TO A THEORY OF IDEOLOGY**

The term 'ideology' is essentially-contested, i.e., it would not be the concept that it is were its interpretation not open to systematic dispute. I propose that the term will be better understood if it is situated within a given paradigm, i.e., a theoretical and/or a political framework. In this way the relevant theory of ideology appropriate to the present study may be identified. I recognize however that no such paradigm will be sufficient to provide a consensus theory of ideology which is wholly acceptable even within its own limits. This means that either none of the competing claims to ideology is satisfactory, or each is sufficient and valid but only within its own limited intellectual and, or political framework. They can all be contested.

#### 1.1 MARXISM, POSITIVISM AND DEBATES ABOUT IDEOLOGY

The Marxist theory is the most discussed frame of reference for determining the nature of 'ideology'. But the term 'ideology' within this theory has been subjected to heated debate. Rooted in the different approaches of Karl Marx on one hand, and Frederick Engels on the other, are 'historicist' and 'structuralist' conceptions of ideology. There is not a single theory of ideology that can be called *the Marxist theory of ideology*, just as there is no single positivist theory of the same. Scholars using the two paradigms (ie marxism and positivism) are united only to the extent that they apply the tools of analysis proposed by the distinctive methodologies of the two theories, while yet reaching entirely different and in some instances, conflicting conclusions. This means that, there is scope for diversity in the dominant political reference points and their corresponding intellectual paradigms.

The paradigm in which the idea of conflict is central, has its roots in the writing of Marx himself. He viewed ideology as a critical, negative concept (as is evident in

Theses on Feuerbach, and German Ideology). Ideology is seen as a distorted form of consciousness which appears in interpretations of the world. The thought systems of previous philosophers (particularly the German ones) were themselves considered ideological and dismissed as "idealistic". Even those who were acclaimed as materialists such as Hobbes had their philosophical systems condemned by Marx as being ideological. As a negative, pejorative term 'ideology' suggests biased and distorted interpretations of the world.

Engels (1890, 1969, 1970) for example, saw ideology in a somewhat different way. For him ideology was more of a positive term than a negative, (abusive) one. Engels emphasised the distinction between theory and practice as the corner-stone for understanding ideology. It is along this line that he viewed ideology as a form of thought which is basically articulated in line with a particular class's 'objective' interests. Whilst Marx provided the background for historicist accounts, Engels laid the foundation for structuralist explanations of ideology, within the Marxist theory.

The latter position was to echo strongly among later generations of Marxist scholars and practitioners. Lenin's "class ideology", Lukacs's and Althusser's structuralism, for example the theory of 'Ideological State Apparatus' (I. S. A), Gramsci's 'hegemony' theory, and so on, testify to the Engelsian influence. Likewise the leading scholars of the 'Frankfurt School' such as Adorno follow Engels in taking a positive, as distinct from a largely negative, view of ideology. But the latter Marxist scholars insist on a psychological approach to discussing ideology. They sought to detect the actual 'psychic links' between mind and reality. So there is, beyond the basic materialist positions about the relationships between 'Being' and 'Consciousness', no single theory of ideology that can be labelled, *the Marxist theory of ideology*.

The positivist paradigm is open to many interpretations as is the Marxist paradigm. There is found in the contributions to the debate on ideology within this paradigm,

heavy reliance on the distinction between 'science' and 'ideology'. The positivist paradigm rests its claims on functionalist grounds. Its initial premise is a theory of society that is built around consensus not conflict, that is, society as a loose kind of co-operative rather than antagonistic social stratification system. But despite this unity of purpose there cannot be said to exist a consensus within the positivist theories of ideology.

Durkheim following Comte built a theory of ideology on the traditions of Francis Bacon, in particular with regard to his rejection of subjective forces that interfere with the acquisition of knowledge. Talcott Parson's theory of ideology was built around the same premise: ideology as subjective opinions which are far removed from scientific activity. The idea is that ideology is "the product of fanaticism and of the passions" thereby suggesting that ideology is to be seen from the perspective of the rationality, irrationality or non-rationality of the beliefs with which it is involved.

Mannheim's theory takes ideology in a pragmatic sense. An attempt is made to resolve the claims of the Marxist conflict paradigm and the positivist claims to consensus in social relationships. As such he saw ideology as a *weltanschauung*, the world-outlook of particular social strata in the society. Geertz (1965) made the simplistic but nonetheless puzzling claim that ideology is a map which guides one through a complex world.

There is therefore, no single theory or claim to a theory of ideology which appears to present a universally acceptable conception even within either of the two dominant political and methodological frameworks. There is thus a range of possibilities about ideology: one is conflict, one is positivist consensus, one is subjective forces, and so on. My concern here is not, however, to determine which claim to a theory of ideology is better than which. On the contrary the attempt here is to identify the relevant theory of ideology which is likely to prove suitable for the present study.

Such a task can be achieved by basing the justification for a particular account on the specific methodological framework (a social and philosophical stand-point). Furthermore, this move is appropriate because it is by reference to such frameworks that analyses are conducted, positions presented, questions raised and problems tackled. The choice of the framework is equally difficult because there are many of such available. But the two dominant theories of society which were already referred to, may be taken as limiting the choice.

Without prejudice to the points raised earlier, this chapter's discussion of ideology will centre on the Marxist claims to the theory of ideology. The debate within that paradigm offers an interesting confirmation of the contentious nature of ideology. I shall therefore attempt to see if any of the accounts within the Marxist tradition can work for this study. In doing this, an attempt will be made to trace the development of the term itself and show the tensions it had generated. A position to serve as a working guide for my use of ideology within the context of this study will then be offered.

## **2 THE ORIGINS OF THE TERM**

### **2.1 THE ENLIGHTENMENT PHILOSOPHES**

The origins of what were to become theories of ideology are to be found in the pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment thinkers. Thomas Hobbes, Francis Bacon, Condillac, Helvetius, Holbach, and a host of other philosophers advocated positions which gave the concept of ideology its foundations. The critique of religion, the Hegelian 'Idea', the Feurbachian materialism, however, were the most articulate and significant foundation ideas.

The enlightenment thoughts were rich in providing the connections between theories of ideology and some pre-nineteenth century philosophical systems. Worth noting is

the main position articulated and accepted with almost unanimity among the enlightenment thinkers that prejudices and irrational elements enter into cognition and affect our knowledge. These are said to be rooted in traditional religious representations which distort and misrepresent our understanding of reality. Francis Bacon's materialism for instance, was of great influence in this regard. The critique of religion occasioned by the enlightenment philosophes was particularly pronounced in the thoughts of Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx, all of whose theories raise issues in epistemology and the sociology of knowledge. It is important to understand these issues and their implications for theories of ideology.

One philosopher who built on Bacon's materialist account of the world, but whose materialism was radically different from that of Bacon was Hobbes. His materialism served as a foundation for later theories of ideology. The Hobbesian theory of knowledge, started from the premise that only material and finite things are intelligible to the human mind. So it is not plausible to claim that man can know anything about the existence of an immaterial being, God. Hobbes held in the Leviathan that the contradiction between the finite and the infinite under which the material and immaterial fall makes the ideas of religion unintelligible to man. Religion becomes in his writing, an idol, a prejudice that disturbs the cognition of reality. In this regard, religion is to be explained by man's fear and ignorance of natural causes. Hobbes held that, it is "this fear of things invisible", which "is the natural seed of that, which everyone in himself calls religion" (1975: 168). However, these critical comments notwithstanding, Hobbes favoured the use of religion in society (presumably as an ideology) in order to impose some kind of a control, peace, and stability. He believed that, such imposition would prevent a perpetual war of everyone against his neighbour and provide for some common happiness. In this respect religion is a factor in subduing the nastiness and brutishness of life in the state of nature; it reinforces the social contract which is presupposed by an orderly and peaceful social life. Thus the need for law and order justifies the use of religion as an

ideological form of control in Hobbes' social contract theory. Religion therefore becomes, for Hobbes, doubly ideological: on the one hand it is an idol which is opposed to proper rational thinking, and so a bundle of distortions; on the other hand, it is an instrument for control, an ideological form, thus being a collection of lies that promotes a certain desired order in social life.

The critique of religion was later to play a crucial role in the development of the concept of ideology. Helvetius and Holbach for example, used it as a launching-pad for their theory of 'priestly deceit', which explained religion by reference to the conspiracy of the priests, to acquire certain benefits allowed by power and control. So they held, men deliberately employ religion to deceive people, and mislead them. These were crucial foundations for the development of the concept of ideology.

## 2.2 BACKGROUND: THE FRENCH CONTRIBUTION

Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754 - 1836) introduced the term 'ideology' to post-revolutionary French politics and public affairs. It was in 1801 that "the subject matter as ideologie .... appeared .... in the title of Destutt's *Traite de l'ideologie*" (Seligar: 1977: 14). De Tracy used 'ideology' to refer to 'the science of ideas', a new body of knowledge which sought to make ideas relevant to politics by consolidating the achievements of the enlightenment philosophes. The science of ideas, as advanced by de Tracy, was thus essentially parasitic on earlier philosophical systems that laid the foundations for the development of science and scientific thought. Ideology, for those who pursued the science of ideas (the ideologues), was an attempt to link philosophy with the natural sciences, a feature of the persisting tendency at that time, of breaking loose from metaphysics and theology. This use went along with the development of scientific thought and the subjection of all thought to the canons of reason and rationality as opposed to the dogma and authority of religion and metaphysics which stand contrary to the then 'new' scientific outlook and its attendant liberalism in the economy, politics and society.

Destutt de Tracy was influenced by a number of philosophers. Significant to the development of his science of ideas were the influences of Locke and Condillac for both of whom, all human knowledge was knowledge of ideas. But perhaps a more direct influence which echoed in the theory of ideology in both de Tracy and future philosophers were the works of Francis Bacon (*Novum Organon*, 1620) and Rene Descartes (*Discourse de la methode*, 1637). These were two revolutionary methodological writings which proposed a new approach to scientific knowledge based on critical rationalism as opposed to the ancient (and mediaeval) view of science as an obstacle to the knowledge of reality.

Both Bacon and Descartes sought to replace Aristotle's philosophy of science which was based on deductive formal logic. Bacon conceived of scientific reasoning as deductive being based, he claimed, on the observational and experimental method. He held that science is possible and capable of producing knowledge only when human cognition is rid of certain irrational factors, 'idols', which obstruct proper and true cognition of reality thereby preventing it from reaching the truth. For Bacon therefore, the observational method and inductive logic can succeed in developing science only when these idols, or false notions are eliminated. These were identified as idols of, first, the 'tribe': superstitions, passions, emotions; second, the 'cave': the idiosyncrasy of each individual as determined by his character, education and general disposition; third, of the 'market-place': the linguistic signs and elements of language used in social interaction among men; fourth, of the 'theatre': the authoritative and dogmatic forms of thought. The first two operate simultaneously and are relevant to the issues of social determination of ideas. Larrain observed that, Bacon's theory of idols contain some views of ideology "which emphasize its opposition to science rather than its social referent" (1979: 22).



Bacon's criticisms of the idols was for Condillac, the starting point of that reformation of consciousness which was the principal aim of the enlightenment. Helvetius and Holbach later echoed Bacon's and Condillac's views on the idols. The point for all three following the tradition of Bacon, was that anything that stands contrary to reason in the process of cognition constitutes 'idols' or 'prejudices'. Consequently Helvetius in his *De L'Spirit* (1758) formulated a position that was to become central to most theories of ideology, and sociology of knowledge. He held, according to Larrain though with a degree of vagueness, that "our ideas are the necessary consequences of the societies in which we live." (1979: 114).

A complementary point worth noting is the force which united all of these philosophers with particular reference to their views on science, knowledge and ideas. They were all at one in their trust in reason. They held that, the idols or the prejudices can only be converted by a good education. Helvetius, for example, was outstanding in this regard for he believed, according to Lichtiem that, the idols, being "the necessary fruit of social constraint and selfish interest", can only "be discredited by reason and removed by education" (1977: 9). Helvetius and Holbach, relating this issue to religion, believed that the priests manipulate metaphysical ideas of considerable force and yet are quite uncertain of their truth. Accordingly man can only be freed and liberated from this alleged manipulation, through a correct education. Thus "the cure for popular superstition is pedagogy on a national scale" (Lichtiem: 1977: 9). This position was to prove an important rallying point for Marx's theory of ideology. It was to this, and its echo in Feuerbach, that Marx responded when he argued in *the Theses on Feuerbach* that, "the educator himself needs to be educated".

### 2.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENTS ON 'IDEOLOGY'

Three strands in the enlightenment preoccupations had a powerful influence on the development of the concept: the critique of religion, the claim that there is a strong opposition between science and the idols or prejudices, and the view that education

serves as an instrument for removing the influences of idols or prejudices on cognition. From these ideas emerged what may be called positive, and negative conceptions of ideology. The positive conception centres, for example, on the use of a 'correct' education to rid people of prejudice, and the critique of religion which sees it as an instrument of control. 'Ideology' as a term of abuse and derogation is the core of the negative conception.

Ideology or the 'science of ideas' started as a positive undertaking, so that for Destutt de Tracy, it is to serve and save men. He was influenced by Francis Bacon's theory of the idols which subjectively disturb human cognition, and are thus opposed to science. Destutt de Tracy emphasised that ideology "must set aside metaphysical and religious prejudices", and that "scientific progress is possible only if false ideas can be avoided." (Larrain: 1979: 27). He thought that, it will *save* men by ridding their minds of prejudice, so that reason replaces prejudice. It will also *serve* them through a system of national education which will fashion a rational and desirable mind. The basis for such an education is of course, freedom from the idols, the prejudices.

The positive conception also owed much to the works of Comte the founding father of positivism. Even though Comte did not employ the term 'ideology', he emphasised the path for the development of a proper science by getting rid of idols. The foundations of human ideas are to be discerned. Education for Comte, was to be rooted in a science of facts; more generally 'ideology' itself became, in his hands, a positivistic concept.

The negative conception is rooted in certain developments in French politics and society. The ideologues (i.e. members of the Institute) helped Napoleon Bonaparte to power. But he broke with them, "for their stubborn adherence to the liberal ideals of the enlightenment" (Seligar: op cit: 14). Napoleon, after his defeat in Russia in 1812, blamed the ideologues for his troubles: "it is to ideology, that sinister metaphysics, that

we must attribute all the misfortune of our beloved France" (Lichtiem: 1967: 5). Napoleon was early among those who developed a negative, derogatory, pejorative usage of the term 'ideology'.

In conclusion therefore, the concept of ideology in its modern senses, is a parasitic one. Various developments in scientific, religious, economic, political and social thoughts in western Europe from the Enlightenment onwards provided the grounds for its emergence as a distinctive concept. In particular the tradition of the critique of religion and the development of materialist philosophy, culminated in the Marxist philosophy. I shall now discuss the major influence upon the development of the Marxist account of ideology.

### **3 THE HEGELIAN PHILOSOPHY**

The German philosopher Hegel profoundly influenced Marx's theory of man, history and society. His influence was particularly strong on the Marxist conceptions of ideology. Although the development of the distinct concept of ideology was not one of Hegel's preoccupations his thoughts nonetheless had profound effect on Marx's thought in this regard. He stands behind the generation of theories of ideology that have characterised the Marxist tradition.

Basic to Hegel's philosophy is the central position given to Mind or Spirit. Man is fundamentally a thinking being. The Idea, or Spirit, takes priority in his philosophy. But there is a universal agent in man's thinking which unfolds through the histories of peoples and civilizations, ie the idea of the 'volksgeist' or 'absolute spirit'. Accordingly, Hegel held that subjective human consciousness has a definite relationship to the absolute spirit. Individuals, in Hegel's system, are but "instruments of history, executors of a process whose meaning is concealed from them" (Lichtiem: 1967: 115). The Hegelian influences on Marx's conception of ideology (and the sociology of

knowledge) was however more evident in Hegel's theory of the dialectical method, the theory that accords centrality to the Mind and History.

### 3.1 THE HEGELIAN DIALECTICAL METHOD

The Hegelian dialectical method entails a philosophy which sees the world, under the aspect of its history. The world manifests a process of transformation, of changing and becoming. Hegel's theory of 'dialectic' is both a logical doctrine of categories and an exhibition of categories in world History. A 'thesis', generates its own opposite reaction, its own negating or contradictory qualities: an 'anti-thesis'; from this interaction with the initial thesis results a 'synthesis'. A 'thesis' and 'anti-thesis' refer to social phenomena (including nature, reason, history, all developments). The world (and its transformation in history) is therefore grounded in contradictions, which are essential for progress. World history is progressive but not in a unilineal manner; the movement is that of contradiction, resolution of contradiction, new contradiction, and so on. So history, within which the world is defined involves a fundamental law of 'negations of negations'.

Hegel held, that the law of 'negation of negations' involves the alienation (*Entfremdung*) of self-consciousness. He expressed this thought by stating that,

"by the law of this inverted world, then, the self-same in the first world is the unlike of itself, and the unlike in the first is equally unlike to itself  
..... " (The Phenomenology of Mind: 203 - 4)

Reality is dynamic so that the process of negation makes all identities "transitory" in a changing and improving process. Human history for Hegel is that in which the absolute Spirit 'Geist' is central. Kontopoulos said of Hegel's system that it

"depicts the externalization of a primordial substance (Being) and its process as Matter, Life, Reason which culminates in a return to itself as Absolute Spirit." (1980: 26).

Thus in the dialectical sense Thought and Being are necessarily connected as aspects of the same unity. In the end, they are "identical" *qua* "Absolute Knowledge". So for

Hegel, 'the rational is real and the real is rational'. The Hegelian dialectical method, radical in its essence was idealistic and monistic in its content.

The dialectical method was used by Hegel in studying history, social change, and social phenomena generally. Supremacy of the consciousness over being was the basis of Hegel's idealism. In his theory of the 'Volksgeist', he argues that the spirit of the German, (and by extension any other) nation took a primary explanatory position in the analysis of society. It is essential to understand the reigning ideas, the motive forces in the historical movement of the nation. In the view of Hegel, such an understanding is necessarily dialectical.

### 3.2 THE YOUNG HEGELIANS

The Hegelian philosophy was promoted by the 'Young Hegelians', a group of admirers of Hegel who, continued to allot the principal role in history and social change to human reason rather than to 'real' factors . Marx was for a time, himself a Hegelian until he came under the influence of an important critic of Hegelianism, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 - 1872).

Feuerbach used the Hegelian dialectical method to arrive at his own theory of alienation. He employed the theory of alienation to advance a materialist critique of religion. Feuerbach conceived the idea of 'God' as "a projection of man's essence, a product of objectivization of the human being" ( Larrain: 1979: 31). He held that, man merely projected his own being into objectivity, and then created, out of this an object of his own projected image, and thus 'converted himself into a subject' (he gave it an objective status). God, according to Feuerbach, "is nothing more than man's own idealized essence projected into a different being". Feuerbach argued that this projected object of man's imagination, the creation of man himself, came to control his creator, man. Man is therefore alienated from his own creation, by the very object that he created. But Feuerbach employed the dialectical method and observed that,

religion was nonetheless the product of a necessary stage in man's process of self-awareness.

There is here a distinction between Feuerbach's criticisms of religion and those of the pre-revolutionary philosophies. For some philosophers such as Hobbes, Holbach, Helvetius and Condillac, religion was a priestly deceit, while for Feuerbach it is the result of self-alienation and the objectification of the human essence. Religion is therefore considered not an arbitrary creation of wicked priests. It has a real basis, and is not a totally irrational set of beliefs. It has moreover, a sensuous basis: the fear of natural factors (for example, death) that humanity was not capable of understanding. Here-in lies a basic connection to Marxism.

## **4 MARX ON IDEOLOGY**

### **4.1 THE FOUNDATIONS**

Marx had neither written a detailed work on ideology nor had he presented a single theory of ideology before his reading of Feuerbach. It was on the basis of Feuerbach's critique of religion that Marx's ideological thesis sprang to life. The theory of ideology in Marx is grounded in his theory of history, but this can only be understood with reference to its Hegelian basis.

Marx was impressed by Hegel's dialectic, especially the mechanism of contradictions, the theory of changing and becoming. But he was disturbed by the idealism of his theory. So he sought to retain its essential features but situated the theory in a materialistic setting. The Hegelian dialectic was itself dialectical for it contains, at the same time, two opposing themes within itself. Firstly it is in its essence critical and revolutionary and this is the source of its attraction to Marx. Secondly, it is idealistic, clothed in a mystical shell and it was this mysticism that basically led Marx to depart from Hegelianism. Accordingly Marx argued that his dialectical method is not only different from that of Hegel but is its direct opposite. He continued the argument that,

"To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which under the name of 'The Idea' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiourgos of the real world, and the real world is external, phenomenal form of 'The Idea'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought." (Capital II: 420).

So Marx parted ways with Hegelianism because it glorified the existing stage of things. In its rational form, Marx held that the Hegelian dialectics includes an affirmative recognition of that which exists, hence Hegel's famous phrase: 'the rational is real and the real is rational'. This is one important sense in which it is commonly held that Hegelianism is reactionary.

Marx dismissed the Young Hegelians because,

"it had not occurred to any of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the connection of their criticism with their own material surroundings." (Collected Works: 5: 1977: 30)

Marx charged Feuerbach (and other Hegelians), with a failure to realise that religion is a social product and its analysis is only possible by seeing it as belonging "to a particular form of society". He charges Hegel with introducing an approach to which, central is:

"the separation of a speculative esoteric history. The history of humanity becomes the history of the abstract spirit of humanity, a spirit beyond the real man". (The Holy Family: 115).

This approach to the interpretation of the world disregards the real, concrete, material factors with, and within which people live; it is as such a form of idealism which, for Marx, must be overcome. That was in part what he set out to do in a bid not only to 'interpret the world', but 'to change it'.

As a result of his perception of these misgivings, Marx developed an 'improved' theory of dialectics, the basis of which is located in the Hegelian theory, his starting point. He adopted this position since he affirmed the revolutionary essence of that theory: it

recognises that every historically developed social form is in fluid movement. It is this which allows a logical space for the inevitability of social change. Marx related this revolutionary aspect of Hegelianism to his own materialist interpretation of history in order to turn Hegelianism 'right side up again'.

In turning the Hegelian dialectics 'right side up again', Marx refused the idea that human history is to be understood in terms of interrelationships of abstract ideas. Instead he used the dialectical method to produce a materialist interpretation of history which culminated in his own theory of 'historical and dialectical materialism'. This theory articulates the bases of the Marxist epistemology, particularly through its accounts of ideology and the sociology of knowledge which are systematically interrelated.

For Marx, thought is necessarily related to social reality, ie, the material conditions of existence of men in society. Dialectical materialism provides the context within which the Marxist conceptions of ideology are proposed and analysed. Thus Marx treats "society as historically determined, as a specific structure of social relationships between real men" (Hamilton: 1974: 19). The production of consciousness, is "directly interwoven" with the material activity and material intercourse of men. Thought is never autonomous, independent of social reality. This is a position which greatly influenced the emergence of the sociology of knowledge. In essence it provides the Marxist paradigm of the sociology of knowledge, from which, Hamilton observed that, "all developments of the social conception of ideology and the relationship between knowledge and society proceed ..." (1974: 26).

The materialist interpretation of the world is dialectical: it approaches phenomena historically, and assesses their complexities, their origins, essence, purposes (both implicit and explicit), and their general trends, within the contexts of time and space. Basic to this approach is the theory of 'contradictions', what Lenin called "the unity of



opposites" (Selected Works: 1: 1977) in a struggle within one single process. Dialectical materialism identifies the essence of thoughts in concrete human life processes. The arena of the social relationships among men is, central to this effort. Marx employed dialectical materialism in reading the capitalist social relations of production. Social classes as the basic stratification units of capitalist societies, stand in antagonistic relationships to each other. The struggle between the social classes is always dialectical in the sense that, the resolution of one contradiction leads to a new one.

It is in the light of the law of contradiction that Marx analysed the transition of society from its primitive form through the modes of production evident in history (communalism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism), in order to argue for the 'scientific' and inevitable emergence of socialism and finally a contradiction-free form of society, communism. The materialist dimensions in these dialectical analyses of society, are to be found in the theory of the 'mode of production' of the material life of men. That theory provides an analysis of social phenomena by means of their form and content. It relates the interplay of 'forces of production' and 'means of production' on the one hand, to the social relations of production of men, on the other. This interplay results in a definite and unique form of society, culture, law, education, juridical structure, and so on. The logical structure that informs the theory of the dialectic is thus retained by Marx.

The Marxist epistemology, specifically the conception of ideology, moves from this complex, logical and holistic pattern of analysis. Basically it states a connection between consciousness and the social structure in terms of the mode of production of material life. The latter entails many processes interwoven in a complex structure of relationships, all of which in the final analysis are social in character. An important point in Marx's theory of ideology is the reference to historical contradictions in society which he developed from Hegel's historicism and its dialectical method. The

historical analysis that is central to Marx's discussion of ideology, replaces the psychologism and sensuousness which characterised the philosophies of Bacon, Helvetius, Holbach, de Tracy and Feurbach.

#### 4.2 CENTRAL ASPECTS OF MARXIST THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

Marx's initial premise for ideology, in addition to the critique of religion and all forms of what he took to be distorted consciousness, is that 'being determines consciousness', i.e. the contradiction of the Hegelian position. The theory of social determinism, contained in the idea of the dialectic and the relationship between being and thought, rests on the idea of necessity in nature: this, in turn, rests upon a species of causal explanation of the relationship between being and thought. Some of the fundamental features which underpin Marx's ideology, include, in addition to the above, the theory of class struggle, and the ideas of inversion as implied by his theory of the 'fetishism of the commodity'. These features are to be expressed in the analysis of the capitalist mode of production and its corresponding form of society.

Dialectical materialism holds that, "all social life is essentially practical". But men's practice produces social conditions which become independent of their will. Contradiction which is very crucial in this regard, is construed to be a necessary result of practice. However the term 'contradiction' is a slippery one, and Marx did not define it carefully. He used it in various contexts and its meaning, for Marx, can only be determined from an interpretation of these contexts. One point can however be asserted with regards to contradiction. It originated in Hegel's dialectic, where it is seen as an opposing tendency within the movement of phenomena which in spite of being interdependent, are also distinct and in a condition of struggle with each other. For Marx, social reality is characterised by a contradictory relationship. Consciousness is explained on the basis of the contradictions of material life and not, as in Hegel, the converse. However, at their mature level, contradictions produce distorted solutions in the mind before they are resolved in practice. Marx therefore held that ideology is a

solution in the mind of contradictions which cannot be solved in practice. Such a solution is deemed to be as a result of man's practical inabilities to confront such contradictions. So ideology conceals the contradictions of which it purports to propose solutions. Ideology in Marx is largely posited in the negative, pejorative sense. This explains why he placed much emphasis on practice; it is only practice, and not criticism, that can appropriately account for, and overcome ideology. But two forms of practice, political and material, are both relevant here.

When linked to the theory of classes and class struggle, ideology appears to be that distorted form of consciousness which deceives the oppressed class while at the same time promoting the interests of the oppressing class. Not all distorted forms of consciousness are ideological. Whilst there are definite relationships between social conditions under which people, as members of particular classes, live, and their thoughts, not all such thoughts are constitutive of class-based ideologies. To be ideological such thoughts and ideas must contain the seeds of distortions of reality which promote a class interest that is in opposition to the interests of another class. Ideology becomes the articulation of the ruling class's interpretation of reality. It is a 'false consciousness'. It is in this light that Marx asserted that, the class which controls the means of material life also controls intellectual production in the society.

#### 4.3 SOME PARTICULAR PROBLEMS OF THE MARXIST THEORY

Many problems are raised by Marx's epistemological assumptions. There are, for example, difficulties to the proposed relationship between classes and ideology. Marx's class-based theory of ideology does not seem to enable an account of the ideas and thoughts of cultural pluralities, of the conflicting social collectives in societies which are neither purely capitalist nor, wholly pre-capitalist, but a mixture of the two, ie, a hybrid form of society. The classical theory of ideology in the Marxist epistemology avoids the uphill task of trying to provide an account of the ideological character of the ideas of those extra-class elements and forces in societies where the class structure is

not so distinct as that posited in the classical Marxist theory. The class structure in many contemporary African societies still undergoing a process of transformation into the world capitalist system, does not reflect the bi-polar fixation of the classical Marxist theory. The understanding of the relationship between consciousness and social structure may, in that context, appear to demand a consideration of various other forms of identity and social solidarity distinct from the classical Marxist social stratification that seems to be more strongly characteristic of advanced capitalism than it is of developing capitalist and pre-capitalist forms of society. This criticism brings on stage the large issue of cultural relativism which I shall examine in the next chapter.

The idea of false consciousness notoriously gives rise to a host of philosophical problems. It is odd to attribute truth or falsity to consciousness. Consciousness cannot be either true or false though certain intentional objects of consciousness can be either. The force of the word 'false' when attributed to consciousness is not clear beyond its gesturing towards a kind of distortion of reality, which means that it is the account of reality, rather than, the consciousness itself which is false. Thirdly the crucial thesis of social determinism may be understood in either a causal or non-causal sense (and the latter has many varieties). There is the need to be clear about the nature, extent, and context of the social determination of ideas, consciousness; the precise form that it takes needs to be discussed. It must be inquired whether Marx proposed social determinism in a 'strong' or 'weak' sense; by a weak sense I mean a less ambitious, though perhaps more defensible account of the problems at hand. The distinction is important since the former would have the consequence that Marx's epistemology is fundamentally relativist, while the latter allows for a pragmatic reading of Marxist epistemology with all its attendant consequences.

Two major strands within the Marxist theory bear upon the whole question of the social determination of ideas and consciousness. One, is the base/superstructure thesis which encourages a structuralist reading of Marxist epistemology. The other is the

historicist account which concentrates on the theory of contradictions that characterise the social relations among people as members of social classes. It is, at this stage, not clear if historicism and structuralism can co-habit in the Marxist epistemology without contradiction. I shall address the problems of social determinism of knowledge in due course (5: 99 - 111).

The relationship between science and ideology has been much debated following the canonical writings. It is not clear whether or not ideology represents an anti-thesis thesis to science as implied by the Baconian theory, or indeed by Lenin's accounts of science as being distinct from ideology. If ideology is to be considered an antithesis to science, then it follows that all kinds of preconceptions and irrationalities which tend to interfere with reason and thereby prevent it from reaching the truth are ideological. On the other hand, if ideology is not seen as an anti-thesis to science, then it has to be determined which epistemological features it shares with science. It may, for instance, be argued that both ideology and science have a common basis in the consciousness of the originating class or culture. On the other hand it could be argued that, in either case a certain conception of science is required to serve as a working definition of ideology. Engels, Lenin and later Marxists modified and extended the basic account of ideology. Engels for example, emphasised a structuralist approach by reference to the metaphors of the base-superstructure relationship. Lenin put some premium on a positive account of ideology in his account of ideology as an instrument for a class in the struggle for socialism. These differences notwithstanding, they are united by the use of the Marxist paradigm.

A lot of what has been said earlier in this chapter raises issues that fall within the territories of relativism and social determination of consciousness. Both of these are basic to the sociology of knowledge. I shall now propose an account of ideology to meet the purposes of the present study.

## **5 'IDEOLOGY' FOR AN AFRICAN CONTEXT**

### **5.1 IDEOLOGY AND SOCIETY**

The context for this study differs from that which is the subject of Marx's analysis. His theory of ideology works mainly in the context of the advanced capitalist society, although his most basic claims (like the relationship between Thought and Being) are if valid, universally so. However, Marx's political economy allowed that, the form of society is relative to the level of development of the productive forces within history. It follows that there is no straight-jacket within which to fix all capitalist societies at different levels of their development. Otherwise the dynamism entailed by the historicism of the Marxist theory will be defeated. Hence there is need for an appropriate theory of ideology which recognises these apparently relative differences in the level of the development of the forces of production, ie, the degrees of sophistication of the capitalist form of society in different places and times. I have in mind here the developing capitalist societies in Africa especially Nigeria.

### **5.2 BELIEFS, RATIONALITY AND IDEOLOGY**

Boudon (1989) argues that the question of the rationality and irrationality of beliefs is relevant to any discussion of ideology irrespective of the paradigm adopted. I follow Boudon in this: the criteria of rationality have to be taken into account in examining any ideology. There is both an epistemological verdict and an explanation of its mode of production inherent in the relationship between rationality and ideology.

Beliefs, thoughts and other intentional objects of consciousness are expressible in sentence forms. Such expressions gain their meaning within their socio-linguistic context. It is a particular feature of belief statements as constituents of ideology that they interact systematically with notions of interests, motivation, preferences, and so on. The study of ideology is intimately related to an examination of examples of such interrelated systems.

### 5.3 INTERESTS AND IDEOLOGY

It has been suggested that one may,

"talk of ideologies in plural, as the opinions, theories, and attitudes formed within a class in order to defend and promote its interests."  
(Larrain: 1979: 14)

Beliefs and belief systems are central to the concept of ideology. It is by means of this centrality that the ideological orientation of a social group can be analysed. So Barry Barnes correctly maintains that given beliefs are ideological if they are created, accepted or sustained, in the particular form that they have only because they are related to particular social interests.(1977: 45 - 58)

Ideology here assumes an explanatory function. The idea of interests as it relates to ideology is not that of persons being interested in something (i.e. the notion of interests which implies that an individual is prone to pay attention to particular things, though this itself might be ideological since it is socially determined). It should be added that such interests, be they political, economic, cultural, or religious, are necessarily of a group or class and not those of a specific individual. Such interests are to be understood holistically and are therefore, historical and relative to forms of society. Such holistic interpretations of belief systems and their relationships to interest are necessary and sufficient conditions for ideology. As interests are crucial in this account of ideology they may be further considered at this point.

‘Interests’ have been interpreted in various ways. For Benn (1960) interests are synonymous with wants. But what we want may not necessarily be in our interests, and vice versa. If wants and interests are identical, it will follow that the conditions under which interests are achieved must be specified. These conditions are many and are unstable. So it is for this reason that interests are not identical with wants.

Interests are defined by Talcott Parsons for example, in terms of wealth and power. These are the potential means to any ultimate ends. Interests are thus in this regard, "generalized means to any ultimate ends" (1949: 262). Such a consideration of interests is predicated on individualist principles whereas, I have argued, the various constituents of an ideology can only be understood holistically. The immediate relevance of wealth and power qua interests to issues like the ideological character of educational knowledge is minimal.

I follow Barry (1965), in understanding interests as attributes of social collectives. Whilst individual persons have interests, their interests stand neither in isolation from those of the rest of the people in the society, nor are they located outside the context of history. Interests as Polsby (1959) observed, are embodied in the interaction between people as members of social groups or classes. By their very nature therefore, interests in the context of social and educational discussions, are predicated on holistic grounds. This suggests a relational view of interests whereby, the statement 'X is in A's interests' indicates a linkage between social action, policy and collective position, on the one hand, and a social collective, social class or group on the other hand. The notion of 'interest' is here used in the sense of something ('X') being in some one's ('A's) interest, whereby gaining 'X' leads 'A' to the enhancement of his or her wellbeing. Such a conception of interests shows 'A's commitment to 'X'. 'X' is thus treated as worthwhile. In this evaluative sense of interests, it can be said, that 'a good health care delivery system is in the interests of citizens of a country 'B'.

Interests then are to be understood in relation to social actions or policies of members of given social collectives. Interest is here taken as an explanatory term, as it was by Marx, Weber, Parsons and others. The focus here is on an explanatory conception of interests of social collectives, not individuals.



Interests are explanatory. They have an explanatory function in the system described above, of beliefs, motives, desires, preferences, and so on. As Hindess holds, they provide actors with reasons for actions, and "they are derived from features of the social structure" (1986: 116). Interests are the source of motivation for social actions and policies. In this case interests operate in similar ways like values, norms, and so on. But as sources of motivation, interests differ from values, preferences, wants, fears, dislikes, desires, needs and impulses. The question arises then as to what is the connection between interests and other forms of motivation?

Hirschman (1977) argues that, what basically distinguishes interests from other terms of motivation is that, questions of benefit to the persons involved are crucial to their pursuit. Actions pursued are those deemed to be of most benefit to the group or class. Members of other social collectives may gain from the original interested action and the policy it is intended to implement but it is likely to be of much benefit to them, or is only superficially beneficial to them. For example, when a specific educational programme is designed by the state such a programme may benefit all, at least in the short term, but it is bound to benefit the ruling class much more in the long term.

Hindess has argued that, given this conception of interests, "the possibility must be considered that actors may not always recognise their own interests" (1986: 116). Goldthorpe's (1968) 'affluent worker' thesis provides a clear example. In this case there are contradictions between the workers' class position and the corresponding pattern of interests on the one hand, and their short term affluence afforded them by a system which in the long run is against their real interests on the other. Questions about the actors' real interests therefore arise. The idea of 'real interest' is the subject of the Marxist notion of 'false consciousness' and is variously debated. That idea also features in the debate between Lukes (1976) and Benton (1982) over objective interests. It has, further, a certain relationship to the power structure in the society. Gramsci's 'hegemony and rule by consent' theory, as well as the 'dominant ideology'

thesis, raise further questions about the idea of who determines a collective's real interests. However, interests are relative to time in the sense that, their contents may change with the relative changes in time and circumstances (the material and other relevant conditions). Collective interests are thus dynamic. Processes and factors such as social mobilization, and the acquisition or loss of power may change the interests being pursued by a class or social group.

Each social collective has its own identity. An identity consists in the significant features which single out each collective. As people may belong to different social collectives at the same time, they possess different, and some times, conflicting identities. What is in the members' interests provides the criteria for identity of members of a collective. Sometimes the identities and the interests contradict each other. This provides an interesting reference point in the issues in the ideology of educational knowledge in the sense that, different interests then bear on the activity of educational knowledge production. Questions are thus raised about the specific accounts or explanations that we then give of such knowledge which is the outcome of the interplay between different or conflicting interests at one and the same time, and in the same society. These questions will be central to my discussion of the ideology of educational knowledge.

It follows from the centrality of interests to ideology, that the notion of 'interests' is going to be of very considerable importance in the ideology of educational knowledge. Since all ideologies can only be specified holistically the question of the identity and the explanation of particular ideologies is going to give rise to issues of cultural pluralism and the relativism that is often held to be entailed by the existence of such pluralism. I shall now consider cultural relativism and its relationship to ideology.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CULTURAL RELATIVISM**

#### **1 RELATIVISM IN CONTEXT**

In this chapter I shall examine issues of cultural relativism that arise in the contexts of societies that are cultural pluralities: particular reference will be made to African societies. I have already argued that the study of educational knowledge should proceed holistically (1: 20 - 4, 2: 25 - 6, and 31 - 37; and that ideologies are to be understood as interactions of various elements: actions, beliefs, judgements (3: 64 - 8). Holistic explanation (i. e. the insistence on understanding individual items such as beliefs in terms of a larger structure) is the fundamental methodological axiom of cultural relativism. How is cultural relativism to be interpreted and understood?

Relativism in the view of Feyerabend originated in ancient Greek philosophy. The claim by Protagoras that, 'man is the measure of all things' is one of the earliest expressions of a relativist position. Man is the judge of all matters not in the sense that his/her individual judgements are infallible, but rather in the sense that his/her ideas can be the only context for the discussion of the world in which he/she lives and the answering of questions that can be asked about it. Wittgenstein (in the Philosophical Investigations), famously states that, "the limits of my language are the limits of my world". The world is perceived, understood and judged through the conceptual frameworks embedded in the language of the social agent. However it seems that different people with the same or similar experiences may yet perceive and/or interpret reality differently and so make different claims about the world. There are many such claims even within a single society which act as rallying points for group identity and differentiation. Understanding the status of these different (and in some cases conflicting) perceptions, beliefs, and actions undertaken in the light of them, is what is at stake in assessing the claims of cultural relativism. Actions, like beliefs and judgements only have meaning within particular conceptual schemes, and those meanings can only be made explicit by reference to certain rules. As Winch argued, "it

is only in terms of a given rule that we can attach a specific sense to ..... words" (1958: 27). The same is true of actions. Relativism, then, enters on the back of the thought that what it is rational to believe or to do in one society or culture, it is, or may be, irrational to believe or do in another.

What is at issue in this claim is the denial of the universality of any particular standard of rationality and the assertion that beliefs, actions, values, judgements and so on, are all determined by and within the culture of the group. In other words beliefs, actions and judgements are only intelligible in the light of the culture (the totality of the conceptual framework) in which they are found. Cultural determinism features at the very beginning of this discussion. Whether or not the force of 'determination' in the statement of this relationship is causal is another issue (see 5: 95 - 103). It is, however, pertinent to note that unless one is able to say what determines what the deterministic basis of relativism is itself undermined. I intend, at this stage, to speak about relativism in a non-causal sense, so that a given set of beliefs, decisions, and so on is intelligible only in virtue of a given 'framework'; a holistic frame of reference. It is first necessary, then, to outline a view which I should call the traditional theory of cultural relativism.

## **2 THE TRADITIONAL THEORY OF CULTURAL RELATIVISM**

The nature of cultural relativism and what it entails has been discussed by many philosophers and social anthropologists. In particular cultural relativism has been analysed with regard to the relativism of beliefs (as in Winch: 1958, Lukes: 1976, and Bloor: 1976). Beliefs are taken to be the focus of cultural relativism. An initial feature of cultural relativism that gives a central place to beliefs is doubt over the universal validity of reality claims. Such doubts are grounded in the social fact of the plurality of forms of reasoning, tests of truth and hence, interpretations of the facts of the world. A belief or a judgement is held by most relativist theorists to be valid only for those who subscribe to, or are members of, a specific social collective within which such a belief is held.

The starting point of the traditional theory is an empirical (anthropological) one: the sheer multiplicity of belief systems. This multiplicity has given rise to a problem of how to understand and evaluate new as well as conflicting beliefs with respect to their rationality and justification. Doubts are raised as to whether such beliefs are to be treated as rational or irrational in a universalistic and absolute sense. The traditional relativist says that beliefs are situation-specific, i.e. they have a cultural context against which background their rationality is to be assessed. Beliefs are irrational in so far as they fail the criteria of rationality which are internal to the cultural background against which they are understood. Beliefs are, in this sense relative to cultural contexts. All other characteristics, of cultural relativism i.e. the rationality of actions and activities, are predicated upon this basic premise.

Winch (1958), Young (1971), and Rorty (1980), go on to argue that there are no objective criteria (in the sense of an Archimedian position which is external to any and all cultures) for judging the rationality of the full range of human beliefs. Furthermore, it is often argued as for example by F. C. White (1983), that it does not even make sense to say that some beliefs are true while others are false except within the ambit of a given culture.

Barnes and Bloor (1982) accordingly add that a 'symmetry' condition is necessary in judging the rationality of beliefs. This condition stipulates that all cultural beliefs (beliefs that are defined by the parameters of given cultures), are to be explained in the same way without any discrimination. A belief is true or false in so far as it satisfies the internal criteria of a given culture. An evaluation of the belief from outside that culture is illegitimate. It is, central to both the empiricist and rationalist traditions that beliefs are rational if they are grounded in reason and evidence.

The relativist however, denies that the idea of universally good reasons is applicable. There can be no logical space for the 'objectivity' required by objectivists (i.e. a 'realist' epistemology). It is not possible to determine 'good reasons' and 'relevant/appropriate evidence' without reference to criteria of rationality that are constitutive of a given society. Where there is an agreement on what the evidence is, this agreement is the product of the internal condition of that particular society.

The correspondence theory of truth (on which the majority of non-relativist theories are based), cannot therefore hold, and something like a 'coherence theory of truth' is needed when assessment of beliefs is at stake. It is accordingly required that, whatever they happen to be, our good reasons and appropriate evidence depend on the best knowledge available to us of our present social structure. Rationality criteria are affected by the growth of experience, when new possibilities become open to us, and our views of reality are accordingly transformed. The criteria for reason and tests of truth are thus relative to time. The growth in and development of experience at any time in history, makes the rationality of beliefs dynamic and historical. The expansion of our present knowledge involves the emergence of new and increased capacities for reasoning about our experiences which we may hitherto have not been able to foresee. These claims are supported by the history of science and technology. For example, the discovery by Copernicus in the 16th century, that the sun is the unmoving centre of the universe was treated as a blasphemy. It was considered as having been based on inappropriate and irrelevant grounds. It was therefore dismissed as irrational (and subversive). But the expansion of human experience made possible by, amongst other things, the invention of telescope later confirmed Copernicus's view.

What is taken to be good evidence rests upon what are taken to be the facts. Such facts, as I have previously argued, are the results of contextual interpretation (as in Quine's holism). They are not understood 'atomically'. So the determination of what is good reason, or evidence, rests upon the thought that facts are not neutral. They are

‘theory-laden’. Theories, or, even more generally, a priori assumptions always, guide people in establishing general conditions of rationality and evidence and the specific claims that follow their establishment. They are not interested in every fact they come across but only those that are more or less coherent with the conceptions of reason and evidence that they already have. Since no facts are neutral in the strict sense, so rival claims to reality are incommensurable.

It follows that, for the relativist, reasons and evidence are engaged in social contexts. As Winch argued they "arise out of and are only intelligible in the context of ways of living and modes of social life" (1958: 100). It is the contextual understanding of reason and evidence that also explains Evans-Pritchard's statement that, he "gained some understanding of communist Russia by studying witchcraft among the Azande" (1951: 129). What therefore count as good reasons for beliefs, are held to be context-dependent. So all beliefs about man and society are induced by social contexts, and have social functions, a point which Hesse (1980) equates with Karl Mannheim's theory of "total conception of ideology".

Non-relativists of different philosophical persuasions reject the thoroughgoing relativization of reason and truth. (Though it should be said that non-relativist epistemologies themselves take somewhat different forms). They reject the theory of the context-dependence of rational beliefs. For example Hacking holds that "there just are good and bad reasons for propositions. They are not relative to anything. They do not depend on context" (1982: 52). It is not however the case that relativists, despite what some of their critics have said, reject the importance of reason and reasons. Rather they emphasize the plurality of forms in which rationality is exhibited and so hold that, we have no reliable (in the sense of independent, or ‘Archimedian’), objective criteria, external to the specific culture in question, for assessing beliefs and actions.

The problem for (the traditional theory of) cultural relativism is whether within a single society there is, correspondingly, a single belief system (and consequently a single scheme for interpreting actions and rituals) whose validity extends to, but is limited by, the boundaries of that society. For it might seem that there is, for example, just one, universal, idea of instrumental rationality even though that idea might take a number of different forms. White argued that,

"Our beliefs are all provisional, embedded as they are in a framework which is open to piece-meal alteration, adjustment and innovation" (1982: 1).

White's point though concerns the 'particularity' of beliefs in a culture, not 'provisionality', because this latter is not an in-built characteristic of beliefs. Accordingly all cultural beliefs are socially determined and valid only for those who hold them. The point is that the question of their validity arises only in the social context of their origin.

The traditional theory appeals to, and rests on, the theory of social determinism which, according to Knight, holds that "there is a causal relation between cultural or social factors on one hand, and judgements of rationality" (1984: 34) on the other. I intend to discuss the theory of social determinism in chapter five. The issue now is whether cultural relativism, together with its causal accompaniments can be accepted, at least in the form in which it is presented by the traditional theory.

### **3 AN APPRAISAL OF THE TRADITIONAL THEORY OF CULTURAL RELATIVISM**

Cultural relativism (as presented in the traditional theory), has been widely criticised by philosophers and sociologists. I shall examine three of these criticisms here.



### 3.1 IS THE THEORY SELF-REFUTING?

First, it has been attacked as being 'self-refuting' on grounds of some logical problems to which it gives rise. Pring (1972), White (1975), Clarke and Freeman (1977), all make (some variety of) this criticism of Young's relativist epistemology. The cultural relativists are said to produce *a reductio* argument i.e. one which denies the truth of that which it intends to prove. Marshall, et al considered cultural relativism to be self-refuting because it "calls into question the very criteria by appeal to which its own truth is established" (1981: 46). Similarly, Fopp charged that, "what we have in (total) cultural relativism is an example of an argument in which the initial premises contradict the conclusions reached" (1981: 39). The core of this argument is that, if the relativist's contention that all beliefs whatsoever are culture-dependent is itself true, in the sense that it holds universally of all belief systems, then that belief is itself both non-relative and true. It follows, on the strength of this counter-example, that the fundamental tenet is false and so the relativist theory collapses. But this argument shows that the premise cannot be accepted as true in a context other than that of cultural relativism itself. It can have no force for non-relativists because it is itself context-dependent. However if they (the statements, or basic beliefs of the relativists that follow from the fundamental premise) are themselves not absolute but relative, then they will lack objectivity in the sense of not compelling assent outside the contexts of that theory. Relativism can only be of force to the converted, i.e. the relativists themselves. In that sense, the claims are not true and can be rejected. There can be no firm ground for the relativist and his/her judgement of the limited validity of all beliefs, because his own initial claims about the relativity of beliefs are, if he is to be taken seriously, unavoidably relative. The relativist is therefore said to be a victim of his own propaganda, hoisted by his own petard.

How far can this criticism of cultural relativism be sustained? The claim that cultural relativism is self-refuting is formulated as an objective criticism. However that criticism does not correctly capture the relativist's position. It is illegitimate to use such

a premise against the relativist. The 'self-refuting' criticism presupposes an objective (correspondence) theory of truth, and that is just what relativism questions, so it cannot be used against it. Onus of proof rests with the non-relativist. In formulating his criticism, the non-relativist cannot rely on his own standards of assessing rationality and his own tests of truth because they, of course, beg the argument in his own favour.

It appears then that an independent, non-partisan standard for evaluating the rationality-content of the two contending positions, is required in order to settle the question. But the relativist says that such a possibility is ruled out since there can be no 'Archimedian' position from which the two points of view can be refereed.

If the relativist is to be convinced of the falsity of his own position, he will rightly demand something more than the covert assumption of his critic's position. The objectivist could of course, say the same of the relativist: the dilemma centres around the difficulty of even stating the conditions of the argument without making use of one of the two contending cases. Some of those who insist on the self-refutation charges further feel that any attempt by the relativist to resolve the dilemma by denying the relativism, and so the lack of validity of his basic claims, leads him, to "a regress" which then renders his theory and its claims unintelligible. This regress is generated in the view of Putnam (1981) by the fact that the relativist's claims and arguments for the relativism of beliefs are not themselves absolute, they are relative.

McCullagh's (1984) is justified in his claim that this does not make relativism unintelligible. Putnam's regress argument does not show what is wrong with such a regression. The regression, unless it is shown and proved to be damaging, in fact further *justifies* the relativist's thesis because the logical conclusion of such an argument is: every belief about the world is relative including this belief itself. So unless Putnam can show what is damaging for relativism with this claimed regression, the relativist thesis remains untouched by it. There is nothing in the regression

arguments which prevents discussions of the rationality and the validity of beliefs, the central task of the traditional theory of cultural relativism.

J. P. White and M. Young jointly argued in response to the self-refutation arguments against relativism that,

"to recognise that there can be no criteria of truth or rationality outside of men is not a denial of the possibility of these criteria but a humanising of them, through locating them in our actions, not our methods" (1975:7).

The relativist does not hold that his claims are not themselves context-dependent. He does not say that his claims are absolute in the sense of being immune from social and historical contexts. On the contrary what he argues is that, all beliefs are only properly understood from an holistic, relativistic perspective. He insists that claims about the world (both social and natural), are assessed and justified, by reference to certain standards, which define what is, and what is not rationally acceptable. These standards are not themselves justified by the forms of social life; they are given and they are various.

### 3.2 IS THE IDEA OF RELATIVISED RATIONALITY UNINTELLIGIBLE?

The second criticism I shall look at charges that cultural relativism is unintelligible in its references to its criterial or culture-relative conceptions of rationality. Putnam argued that there is no criterial conception of rationality because

"arguing about the nature of rationality is an activity which presupposes a notion of rational justification wider than ..... institutionalized criterial rationality" (1981: 14).

To argue about rationality is itself an activity. So it has principles and procedures which are not those of a particular culture. "Consensus among grown-ups", argues Putnam, "presupposes reason rather than defining it" (1982: 14). I doubt, however, that Putnam supposes here that the grown-ups who hold this consensus about reason and

rationality, are outside the social and historical contexts, for these are entailed by the process of growing-up and acquiring, such a notion of rational justification.

McCullagh argued that rationality is not 'objective' as is a physical/material object, so it is not "as independent of cultures as some physical objects are" (1984: 330). Moreover philosophers always confront a culture 'with itself'. McCullagh was thus justified in arguing that "we do not employ a notion of rationality extrinsic to our culture in order to criticize what our culture believes" (1984: 330). Lack of certainty does not render (cultural) relativism unintelligible and Putnam does not provide the relativist with a good reason for accepting 'non-criterial rationality'. Putnam's argument does not render the idea of 'cultural relativism' unintelligible.

### 3.3 ARE SOME UNIVERSAL CRITERIA OF RATIONALITY UNIVERSAL?

The third criticism is similar to the second. Total cultural relativism ought to be rejected since it claims all beliefs are context-dependent. Lukes, for example, argues contrary to relativism, that "there are some good reasons for supposing that some criteria for truth are not context-dependent", they are universal and "fundamental" (1973: 238), and that those which are context-dependent are parasitic on them. It is, he suggested, "only by assuming" rational criteria applicable to all contexts that one can fully explain why some beliefs (religious, magical, scientific paradigms, official myths), are accepted or rejected. The grounds on which Lukes based his arguments are those of 'language and logic'. He held that if a group has

"language in which it expresses its beliefs, it must, minimally, possess certain criteria of truth ..... and logic which are not, and cannot be context-dependent" (ibid: 238).

These minimal criteria, Lukes argues, are the basic adaptive human mechanisms for any human society, by means of which "verification is likely to provide the basic paradigm against which other criteria of truth gain their sense" (ibid: 241). His answer to the dilemma of cultural relativism therefore, is found in critical application of the

assumed universal and fundamental criteria of truth and logic. So he argued that, "the sociology of belief need not prohibit a critical cognitive and logical stance vis-a-vis the beliefs it studies" (ibid: 234).

Lukes is not here attacking cultural relativism *sans phrase*. He only attacks its extreme form, and attempts to modify it so that it allows for the relativization of 'some' beliefs, while yet holding that some criteria of rationality are universal and so hold irrespective of any context, social or historical. He therefore seeks a compromise, a middle position between that of the total cultural relativist and that of its proto-critic who rejects the theory of cultural relativism.

There is much to be said for this line of argument, though I do not think Lukes' version is successful. His concession - some criteria of rationality are fundamental - only confirms the strengths of cultural relativism. Exactly which these 'some' are and how they are to be identified is not made clear. The fact that they are assumed, further complicates these problems. The bases of the assumed fundamental non-criterial rationality are those of language and logic. But "the limit of my language is the limit of my world" because there are wider conditions that determine thought and language. So what I cannot think or conceive I cannot say. The language and logic I employ must then be legitimated by what I can think and say i.e. my conceptual frameworks, more generally, my culture. So the strengths of this criticism are at the same time its weakness.

There are many versions of cultural relativism, and there is some consensus that there are certain limits to the relativist thesis. There is a point, for example, at which the words 'to me' and 'to you' cease to make sense when so and so is true for me, but it is not true for you. However, such limits or boundaries of relativism need to be properly delineated and clearly worked out. Unless that clear dividing line is known, there does

not seem to be, an alternative to some form of cultural relativism, no matter to what degree.

## **4 TWO PROBLEMS FOR CULTURAL RELATIVISM**

There are, however, two problems with the traditional theory of cultural relativism of relevance to this thesis.

### **4.1 THE SUBJECTS OF CULTURAL RELATIVISM**

Firstly there is a tendency in the traditional theory of cultural relativism, to see people as passive objects at the mercy of the given cultures which wholly determine what they can believe and do. This view is highly questionable since capacities of people (for example, their judgement of their own and other actions, their ability to deal with complex situations, and so on) with which we are most concerned are not regarded in discussing rationality. Abstractions are but aids to such an effort. Central to cultural relativism is the idea of a human society. In such a society some - perhaps many - are critically active in challenging and changing its rules, regulations and mores. It is people who, in a very obvious sense, make society through their activities: the picture of a fixed society determining everything that takes place within it by means of its canons of rationality is a misleading one.

### **4.2 THE METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEM AND HOLISM**

Secondly there are, in some relativist writings, a concentration on individual epistemic categories, for example belief, which is often given a primary status as *the* subject of relativism, even though beliefs tend to be seen in terms of cultural wholes. So belief is sometimes analysed *qua* individual epistemic term detached from its network of relationships with other epistemic terms and other such socially significant items as emotions and interests. The confusion arises out of employing inconsistent methodological instruments in discussing a single epistemic phenomenon whilst at the same time, treating the framework of the discussion as 'context-dependence'. So the

traditional theory of cultural relativism, treats beliefs and so on, as the subjects rather than the complementary objects of study in a positivistic/methodological-individualistic sense. The result is that belief is given a primary position at the expense of other epistemic/cognitive terms that enter our explanations and descriptions of rationality in an holistic way.

Beliefs are necessary for the understanding of a person's actions or behaviours. But they are not sufficient. There are other epistemic items, for example motives, desires, emotions and interests and so on, which interact with beliefs to make human actions intelligible and, if indeed they are, rational (or irrational). Such, therefore, must be considered by any serious social/anthropological theory. A recognition of this implies that the appropriate methodology is necessarily holistic, so that the focus, becomes, an *epistemological structure*, including but not restricted to beliefs 'behind' all human actions.

## **5 SOME MODIFICATIONS TO THE TRADITIONAL THEORY**

A modified theory of cultural relativism is here proposed. It rests on two interrelated views of rationality and a structure that can be employed to explain the rationality or irrationality of human beliefs and social actions.

### **5.1 LIMITED AND EXTENDED RATIONALITY**

Following Brown (1990: 183 - 197), two senses of rationality may be identified for my present purpose: *limited* and *extended rationality*. Limited rationality is that which marks the validity and consistency of our beliefs in relation to other beliefs. This sense of 'rationality' rests on a wide-ranging logical structure whose function resides in its provision of assessment procedures. Thus beliefs which are proved to be inconsistent with our basic beliefs and basic beliefs which are mutually inconsistent, and in general cannot stand the scrutiny of our tests of reasoning, are deemed to be rational or irrational or arational. But this sense of rationality lacks certain ingredients which are

necessary for it to function within an holistic framework that cultural relativism, as of necessity, requires. So a second sense of rationality is proposed as, 'extended rationality'. This extends to the properties of the social wholes.

Extended rationality is a feature of the assessment and explanation of the beliefs and actions of people as members of cultural collectives. Similar explanations or assessments may not be possible in terms of limited rationality since that is a characteristic of individual beliefs, judgements and actions. Limited rationality is not central to the present discussion just because its concern is with particular beliefs and actions. Individuals can, of course, give reasons for their beliefs and actions, and these can be accepted (or not) as rational without any regard to the belief structure of a social collective. Individuals may hold and dispose of beliefs (such as: 'there is a dog outside my window') provided they can individually, irrespective of any collective efforts or considerations, justify them as well-grounded. But the extended theory of rationality disallows justification of beliefs or actions without reference to one kind or another of collective consideration. Evidence for beliefs or actions must in this case, be related to the rationality criteria and hence belief structure of a given cultural or social collective. Thus what an individual holds as rational is not necessarily rational for a whole social group.

In sum: limited rationality is the disposition of individuals to offer reasons for their particular beliefs. (It is in this sense that man is a rational animal). Extended rationality on the other hand, is a structure that extends to a whole complex of beliefs, actions, motives, interests, emotions, goals, values, and so on. It is a structure whose constituents, such as consistency are criterial for a social whole. Indeed a culture would not be such if it did not exhibit a consistency of elements, criteria of relevance, verification procedures, agreements on what is to count as 'moral' and so on.



‘Extended rationality’ is, of its essence, an holistic concept: its application is uniquely to what it is rational for all members of a group or culture to think, believe, judge and do. It is essential to the discussion therefore, of educational knowledge as ideological.

## 5.2 AN HOLISTIC EPISTEMOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

Since in the theory of extended rationality I am employing here, rules of conduct are public, they need a reference framework. This reference framework is, I suggest, an epistemological structure which underlines and defines each collective’s standards of rationality. It is in terms of this structure that my modified form of cultural relativism is to be understood. The epistemological structure determines the rationality of conduct, by reference to its complex, interlocking components such as beliefs, desires, actions, values, motives, feelings, emotions, and so on. Beliefs are held, and specific actions are undertaken because they are relevant to achieving certain socially and publically sanctioned and identified goals. The structure also contains means of determining the propriety of the goals, by means of values and theories (especially ethical). There is implied here a connection between intention and reason on one hand, and social action on the other.

The epistemological structure outlined here, is one that makes instrumental rationality central. But I am interested in instrumental rationality because of its significance for the production of educational knowledge in most societies. I am aware that, there may be other interests in the beliefs, emotions, and actions of members of a society which would need an extended rationality, perhaps even different rationality. But I am not discussing these here.

Human activities (i.e. social actions) become the main concern, of cultural relativism, rather than beliefs considered atomistically, because they are central to human existence. It is the intentional activity which produces material and social life, and is crucial to cultures at all times. Rational social action entails the making of judgements

by human subjects, in the context of their cultural collective's interest structure as defined by its cognitive structure (not in terms of their unique and individual capacities), regarding their conviction that a certain course of action will achieve or lead to the achievement of a given desire/preferences or meet some specific values, or goals or even will express what they feel. Rational social action is accordingly goal-directed, and the goals are public not private. The difference is the social direction of the goals of the particular action. Under the theory of cultural relativism I propose here, there is no avoiding the social content of human practice since we are here discussing man in society and his own recognition of 'the social'. Moreover giving reasons for one's beliefs (i.e. limited rationality) is itself a social activity at least in the sense that, one is, by that activity, relating to other person or persons and within the context of time and specific situations.

It is the desire to achieve or meet public goals, to act in accordance with specific values, which propels members of a cultural collective to discriminate amongst beliefs (hold some and reject others), and to act or conduct themselves in a specific manner. It is the recognition of the social aspect of holding beliefs, acting upon them, defending a policy and so on, which further confers social status upon man, who is essentially a social, active being, with the capacity to subject various forces to his circumstances. The cognitive structure has to reflect this capacity. Hence rationality takes a specific social form. It is positively related to the best criteria of reasoning, tests of truth and judging between beliefs, and courses of action which are taken to be the best available to a given cultural collective at a specific period in history. So standards of rationality are social and are dynamic as cultures are; they are neither outside history nor unassailable by it.

### 5.3 THE MODIFIED THEORY OF CULTURAL RELATIVISM

This structure of rationality is internal to the idea of the cultural collective and so the beliefs and actions of its members cannot be faulted externally, from other stand-

points. A specific extended rationality determines the identity of an individual as a member of a collective. Changes in the epistemological structure produce changes in the criteria of social identity, for example, a closed monastery uses radically different criteria of identity than those that determine for example individual workers on a conveyor belt in a large industrial undertaking.

But there is a limit to the internality of the extended rationality within cultural groups. Judgements of the rationality of beliefs and actions are never in respect of *all* beliefs and human practices. Only those which one way or the other are considered functional to the specific desires, goals and interests of the cultural collective in question count for purposes of relativism. However everything else may come into the discussion of being functionally relevant to a collective's interests, since it is difficult to draw a boundary between those things which affect or are connected to such interests and those which at any one time are not. Only those publically recognised claims to reality that promote the interests of the collective, are of any meaning and relevance for cultural relativism. Thus it is limited only to the interest structure of social collectives, and does not therefore include other rationality structures or interpretations of the world. But the notion of 'interests' used here is one which is generative, i.e. it sanctions the several cognitive items mentioned above.

The modified theory of cultural relativism, for the purposes of the present study, has the following features. *Firstly*: judgement by the human subject about the rationality-content of new and/or conflicting beliefs within the specific contexts of their production and generation. *Secondly*: judgement is in regards to human practices or activities (for example, sport or charity) the social actions which necessarily entail beliefs but not individual beliefs per se. What is basic is the epistemological structure, a complex and inter-locking set of relationships amongst the epistemic terms that severally constitute it (for example, desire/goals, values/interests, beliefs, and actions), such that none is intelligible without due consideration to the others. *Thirdly*:

it is contextual by reference to the social structure of the particular collective in question, but does not, so to speak, stop there as the traditional theory does. It holds further that the context is also necessarily *historical* since the social structure is hardly intelligible in isolation from its own history. *Fourthly*: its subject is standards of rationality (reference to the theory of extended rationality as against that of limited rationality) and not just rationality as such. *Fifthly*: as with Lukes's (1982) relativism, it is not a relativism applied to all human beliefs, actions and practices. It holds that not all beliefs, or claims about the world are relative to cultural contexts. But unlike Lukes's relativism it provides for a boundary between those which are, and those which are not relative to the interest structure of the given social collective. So what distinguishes two cultures are their respective interest and epistemological structures mutually interactive and so only capable of being understood holistically. But conflict of interests between different cultural collectives and even within one society, may occur. This theory of cultural relativism also rests on the further consideration that there are conflicting views of the world. *Sixthly*: cultural relativism is of theoretical relevance to policy matters mainly because it entails, within pluralities, conflicting cultural tendencies each of which demands a measure of official respect and recognition.

#### 5.4 CULTURAL PLURALISM AND DOMINANT STANDARDS OF RATIONALITY

This modified theory of cultural relativism therefore holds that where conflicting interests co-exist within one single state, the political parent of all the cultural collectives, a dominant standard of rationality takes priority over all the other standards of rationality in any given historical period. It is mainly, but not exclusively, by means of the dominant standard of rationality that conflicts are addressed if not resolved, thereby giving rise to new conflicts or the re-emergence of the old, presumably resolved ones, in new, and perhaps sharper forms. So in plural societies

resolutions are only temporarily permanent and conflicts among contending cultures persist in new forms.

In societies where a modern mode of production (for example capitalism) has not matured to its classical form, different interest/cultural groups of ideological significance often strive to subsist side by side with each other. In contemporary Africa for instance, a number of cultural categories and tendencies, ranging from religious to political and ethnic to economic, often co-exist in conflict. The dominant standard of rationality is, in many cases, class based. Social classes in such cases are included among the social collectives as are sub-cultures like the primordial structures found in societies in transition like that of contemporary Nigeria. Friction between these conflicting forms is of central interest to cultural relativism. I examine this kind of interplay between different ideological forces representing different forms of society in contemporary Nigeria (12: 205 - 9).

In such a situation, the relationship between the different ideological forms is dialectical: some prosper and develop at the expense of others which decay and atrophy. The nature of their relationship is that of the ascendancy of one (or a few) forms. This ascendancy has a direct consequence: the decadance of the others. In the process of struggle therefore, some become dominant over others. The result is the (gradual) dissolution of the sub-ordinated forms of society and their respective ideological expressions. Hence the standard of rationality of the dominant form and its ideological expressions prevail and become dominant. State policies, including the definition of educational aims and objectives, as well as the selection of the appropriate educational knowledge are the means by which the dominant standards of rationality persist. I shall address these issues in chapter eleven of this study, by reference to the production of educational knowledge.

I shall argue that the ideology of educational knowledge should be understood in the light of the theory of extended rationality when applied to the various cultural collectives within a given society, and in particular to their respective interest structures. However the account of the ideology of educational knowledge that I shall propose proceeds from an examination of the basic, central claims of the traditional or classical sociology of knowledge (i.e., the accounts of knowledge production in Marx). The relationship between the socio-economic-cultural structure and educational knowledge, now to be understood in terms of the theory of extended rationality is central to this study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE MARXIST THEORY OF SOCIAL DETERMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE**

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

I shall in this chapter examine certain classical accounts of the view that all knowledge is socially determined. It is necessary to look at these arguments before an account of the ideological character of educational knowledge is attempted. The view that knowledge is socially determined, has been the concern of the Sociology of Knowledge. Some precursors of views which are standard in the sociology of knowledge, are to be found in the classical world, for example the position held by Protogras that 'man is the measure of all things'. However it is not to the classical world that one turns to in search of the theories of social determination of knowledge. The thesis has been variously developed, famously by Marx and his various successors in the Neo-Marxist tradition. The accounts have been numerous and it is difficult to determine whether Marx had one particular view of the theory that he developed (Kontapoulos: 1980: 6). I shall examine some of the central social determinist aspects of Marx's writings.

#### **2 THE BASIC SOCIAL DETERMINIST ARGUMENTS**

The first statement of the Marxist sociology of knowledge is to be found in The German Ideology in which Marx said, in disagreeing with what he called his "former philosophical conscience", that,

"Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc, that is real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of their intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms." (Collected Works: 1976: 5: 36)

Here is posited a relationship between knowledge and the production of material life which has two interrelated strands. Men are 'conditioned' by productive forces and man's production of ideas, is thus conditioned by the development of these forces. The

term 'determine' is crucial here. Marx further argued that, the production of consciousness sets out,

"from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily sublimates of their material life-process...." (ibid: 36)

Furthermore the nature of ideas and consciousness cannot be explained independently of the mode and forces of production; their form and content is owed to social, material forces. Forms of consciousness, ideas, knowledge, for Marx,

"have no history, no development, but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this, their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life." (ibid: 37)

There can be no clearer statement of the determinist thesis. However, the very boldness of this statement raises the question of what the relevance of ideas could possibly be to the determining material conditions of men. Does it follow that ideas are irrelevant to man's struggle to produce his life-processes, or indeed to the class struggle and its outcome? In other words, is the relationship between ideas and life-processes asymmetrical or symmetrical?

It might be suggested that Marx did not, in the above statement entirely dismiss the possibility of a role for ideas in influencing social material conditions and processes. Had he done so, his own theories of history and society would have been politically emasculated from the beginning. For his ideas could then make no difference to real, objective, material conditions under which people live. So his claim can best be represented as a starting point of his analysis: the rejection of the Hegelian 'Idea' is basic. Only the material, objective conditions of existence are the basic, determining factors of the generation of consciousness and knowledge. The issue here is not that of the significance of knowledge in human affairs, but that of understanding it in terms of its primary determination or causation. This much, Marx continued to assert and argue



in most of his works especially The German Ideology and The Theses on Feuerbach. So, in the Preface to A Critique of Political Economy, he argued that:

"the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness". (SW: 1: 1977: 503)

Furthermore, the Manifesto, in which is set out the Marxist agenda, raised the same issue when it asked (rhetorically):

"Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that men's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relation, and in his social life?" (CW: 6: 1976: 503)

Marx's basic contention is thus not in doubt but what is not clear is the nature of the 'determination' involved here. Is it a causal relationship (in either the strong or weak sense), or one of correspondence or even conditioning? One point that is clear however is that consciousness is a dependent variable and can only be explained and understood in the light of "material conditions", which are the determining, independent (or may be interdependent) variables. I shall attempt a position on this problem after I examine the often taken-for-granted meaning of the phrases: "material conditions" and "social being". I shall do this in the light of an examination of the context of the social determination of consciousness.

### **3 SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF THE SOCIAL DETERMINATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

Marx proposed two basic features for his theory of knowledge generation: the mode of production and social class interests. The former appears comprehensive; but it is because of this comprehensiveness that it may be open to criticism. The latter is rather more specific, and generally attracts more attention in the discussions of the Marxist theory of knowledge. The first point of reference in this regard is the Manifesto's famous clarion cry that, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class

struggles" (CW: 6: 1976: 482). It was on the basis of this principle that Marx and Engels argued that,

"the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. a class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. .... so that the ideas of those who lack the means of material production are on the whole subject to it." (CW: 5: 59)

Thus "the rule of a certain class is only the rule of certain ideas" (ibid: 60) and such domination only comes to an end "as soon as class rule in general ceases to be the form in which society is organised" (ibid: 61).

Ideas, forms of consciousness, are then to be assessed in the light of their place in the class struggle the concept of which is central to understanding and overthrowing capitalism. So not all ideas and forms of consciousness are of interest or concern to Marxist epistemology. Only the ruling ideas of an epoch in a society constitute the subject of concern: the investigation, criticism and replacement along dialectical lines. But this concern logically extends to all other 'class' ideas both in the generative and descriptive senses. In other words, Marxist epistemology is mainly an account of what has been called the "dominant ideology". We have to assess ideas in terms of the class interests that they express and from which they are generated in the first place. This argument is supported by a similar contention that,

"it is the mode of production of material life which conditions the process of social, political and intellectual life in general" (Capital Vol 1: 1948 ed: 93 note).

Social classes, however are themselves situated within the context of the reigning mode of production. The class structure is an expression of a mode of production. We cannot make sense of social classes or their struggles except in the light of the mode of production from which they spring. The distinction made by Abercrombie (1980) between what he called 'the mode-theoretical', and the 'class-theoretical' accounts of the determination of knowledge is unacceptable. The modes of production and the

class structure are inseparable both in analytic and practical terms. The determination of knowledge relates to the collective interests of a dominant class within a specified mode of production. The dominant ideology is the ideology of the ruling class. Workers suffer from 'false consciousness' imposed by the ruling class through the latter's control of material and intellectual production, eg, publishing, the educational establishment and the media. Each class has its own ideology which expresses its own interests which will potentially be in conflict with those of other classes. It is therefore in accordance with the material interests of the classes that their ideals are to be understood. Marx argued that,

"....consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production." (SW: op cit: 504)

This is a clear claim that consciousness is explained by class struggle within a definite mode of production, so on Marx's view there is no separating the two.

Knowledge, in the Marxist epistemology, is determined within the context of the reigning mode of production in general, and its corresponding class structure and interests in particular. Under capitalism this means that the bourgeois form of consciousness reigns because it dominates and rules. Therborn (1979) justly argued that, depending on the level of development of the productive forces, the prevailing form of consciousness is essentially that which is articulated, or at least held as relevant, by the ruling class. The ruling class controls the means of determining and disseminating the forms of consciousness supportive of, and supported by, its form of society. The bourgeois form of consciousness rules because the bourgeois mode of production dominates.

However, the position articulated above has certain implications which are problematic. It follows that no other claims to an understanding of the world are produced and disseminated by the ruling class except either those that support it or are

functional to its class interests. But as I shall argue in this chapter, this is mistaken. It suggests that the workers' ideology is distinct because it cannot, owing to its subordinated status, express its own distinctive proletarian interests which have been determined by their class position within the context of the reigning mode of production. There are also problems for the doctrine of false consciousness here for that doctrine seems to allow that both the bourgeoisie and the workers might be mistaken about their real interests. Yet Marx allowed that some elements of a class structure can, and in fact do rise above their class interests and hence mode of production. He argued that,

"the communist consciousness .... may, of course, arise among the other classes too through contemplation of the situation of this (proletarian) class (C W: 5: 52)

Thus through contemplation, such bourgeois elements may possess the forms of consciousness that better fit the interest structure of the opposing class. So there is no one-to-one, direct, causal connection between class position and the production of knowledge.

Again, Marx argued (in the Manifesto and other places) that, at a certain point in history, the bourgeoisie can articulate positions on behalf of the proletariat, for the whole of the society. For example, when the bourgeoisie fought the feudal lords, it not only articulated forms of consciousness appropriate to its interests but to the interests of the other classes in society as well. This is also true, Marx argued, of the proletariat at certain times in its struggle against the bourgeois form of society. But it must be emphasized that this is only true at some, not at all times. Which times these are, will be brought out later in this discussion. What these arguments show is that, even the connection between mental productions and class interest is not as rigid as it is often held Marx, and some of his followers thought them to be.

## 4 THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THOUGHT AND SOCIAL REALITY

### 4.1 THREE SENSES OF SOCIAL DETERMINISM

The nature of the social determination of knowledge is chiefly explained in terms of the relationship between 'Being' and 'Consciousness' or 'Thought'. The term 'Being' is central to an understanding of the nature of the social determinist thesis. Marx employed the term to denote the actual process of the production of social reality. 'Being', Marx argued consistently, 'determines consciousness'; what we need to know is the nature of that relationship, what is the exact mode of operation of that 'determination'?

Marx employed the concept of 'social determinism' - an abstract noun derived from the verb 'to determine' - in three senses and each of these is the basis of a different account of the relationship between being and consciousness or knowledge. First, in the *causal* sense (as implied in his theory of class interests and ideology), each class has different interests which cause (or bring about) a different view of reality. This sense of social determinism is crucial to the doctrine of class consciousness: the real, objective conditions which give rise to, and define class interests, produce a different account of the world, from that which emerges from different conditions. In the second place it was employed in the sense of *conditioning*, for example, the famous statement that, "...the mode of production of material life conditions ..... intellectual life process" (SW: op cit: 503). This sense of the social determinist theory suggests that the ideological character of any set of ideas or knowledge cannot be understood without due reference to the social structure. This sense of social determinism is often thought of as accounting for consciousness in general. In the third place it also was used in the sense of *correspondence*. For example, Marx argued in the The Preface to A Critique of Political Economy that, "with the change of the economic foundations the entire ... superstructure is .... transformed" and also

"... the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a .... superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness" (ibid: 503).

This sense of social determinism explains the production of knowledge by reference to a structural analysis of base - superstructure relationship. While it is suggested that each form of consciousness corresponds to the material reality, the force of this correspondence is less clear. A similar lack of precision characterises both the conditioning, and causal accounts of determinism. In whichever sense one sees the force of 'social determination' of knowledge, it the case that some explanations of these relationships are required.

The first sense of social determinism (i. e. the causal sense), and the third (i. e. the correspondence sense) have a number of different implications for the ideology of educational knowledge, and these will be examined later. But the second sense of social determinism of knowledge (i. e. the conditioning sense) is too generous and sweeping. It only provides the general framework for understanding the relationship between knowledge and the prevailing social structure. The conditioning sense of social determinism only makes obvious claims. I shall, in this chapter only examine the causal and the correspondences senses, since the whole project of the search for an explanatory theory of the ideology of educational knowledge takes off from the general, obvious claims of the conditioning sense of the social determinist theory of knowledge.

#### 4.2 THE CAUSAL SENSE OF SOCIAL DETERMINISM

If, in the Marxist theory, the social determination of knowledge is conceived, quite literally, in the causal sense, then that thesis is a strong one. If the theory is to be interpreted in the strong, causal, sense then it will undoubtedly hold that, every form of consciousness is socially determined. It will then not be possible for Marxist determinism and Marxist theory in general to be accepted as 'science' rather than as

'ideology'. For if Marxist determinism is itself an ideology, and not a science the resulting relativist consequences will damage Marxist claims to universality of explanation. The question then is: could Marx, have intended the strong, causal, thesis when he employed the social determinist theory of knowledge? Kontopoulos argued that, "Marx obviously repudiates the strong deterministic thesis and accepts a more moderate one" (1980: 46). Marx is here understood by Kontopoulos as not using social determinism as the strong thesis that all human activities and thoughts are predetermined by the material conditions - in Marx's case - the socio-material conditions of human life. One causal interpretation of Marx might of course be that all theories are ideological (in the sense of being socially determined) including his own. The specific determinants are the interests of the classes, in particular the interests of the proletariat. The workers are, on this theory, the harbingers of a classless society: non-ideological knowledge will only be possible in a classless society, in which Marxism itself will cease to be relevant (CW: 5: 60). For in that society, all individual interests disappear; all interests are shared by all members of the society. This suggests an interpretation that takes Marxist ideology to be basically pragmatic. Although it is true that there are problems with this interpretation, I am only concerned here with the *possibility* for a pragmatic reading of the Marxist epistemology, which such an interpretation allows.

The problem therefore is to attempt to deconstruct social determinism in the pragmatic direction, such being allowed by the reading of Marx's account of the theory, as above. This pragmatic interpretation of the force of Marx's social determinist theory can provide a clearer explanation of the ideology of educational knowledge. It is particularly important to attempt this if one is to work out the implications of the theory for the Marxist epistemology and his general theory of society.

One of the basic ideas that is given by the Marxist account of determinism is that the production of knowledge is influenced by a particular mode of production and the social classes appropriate to it. Each mode of production, or more precisely, level of development of its productive forces, has a class structure which is distinctively appropriate to it. The Marxist epistemology therefore, is not reducible to, though it springs from, an analysis of, the classical capitalist society. From this it follows that societies that are in some sense 'hybrid' i.e. they have a mixture of different modes of production, some of which may be decaying whilst others are developing, have a radically different class structure from that which obtains in the classical capitalist society. Developing societies of Africa, such as Nigeria provide some examples here.

This point is central to the present study. Developing capitalist societies have class structures different from those which obtain in classical capitalist societies, although their prevailing social relations are of a common capitalist nature. The class structures, and so structures of interests, and forms of thought of such hybrid societies still allow for undeveloped and underdeveloped pre-capitalist forms of consciousness, such as ethnicity, regionalism, religion, and so on. Therefore, the influences that the social structure exerts on the process of the production of knowledge are those of its hybrid modes of production.

Irrespective however, of the nature of society and the level of the development of its productive forces, which in fact account for the differences, Marx's social determinism does not seek to explain all forms of consciousness. It is concerned with those that are in contest within a society, especially the dominant and potentially dominant, ruling ideas. However Marx was not exclusively concerned with these ruling ideas. For one reason they, according to the principles of the dialectic, generate *in part*, their anti-thesis, i.e. contradictory ideological versions. For example the proletarian idea of 'the necessity of fundamental revolution' is in part generated as response to the ruling



ideas of the ruling class of a capitalist society. In this study only those interests and ideas that are in contest in hybrid societies will be examined.

Marx argued that, "the rule of a certain class is only the rule of certain ideas" (CW: 5: 60) because such ideas are those of the class that dominates and governs. The ruling class controls both material, cultural and mental productions. If that class is to be overthrown then an analysis of the ideas it uses in ruling, inevitably occupies a central position in the revolutionary project of the proletariat.

Under the causal thesis of determinism, forms of consciousness arise from the different parts of the social structure, and are based on different (and conflicting) interest structures. (Hence a common social structure can support differing structures of interests). Forms of consciousness generated in this way (and it is implied that all forms are so generated) are inalienably functional; they support and promote only those interests which generated them. They are subject to the demands and nature of that social structure and no other. Such ideas and forms of consciousness have a limited validity and legitimacy; they hold mainly within the frameworks of their respective interest structure(s). Thus, forms of consciousness have a subjective character, since the social structure from which they are generated, is, in a dialectical sense, transitory, and dynamic.

#### 4.3 A CRITIQUE OF MARX'S CAUSAL THESIS OF SOCIAL DETERMINATION

Marx's arguments are, then, limited to the ruling ideas of a society: this itself suggests that he did not subscribe to the strong thesis of social determination of knowledge. He was clear about the specific forms of consciousness which attracted his principal concerns. If he had failed to determine the form of consciousness with which his epistemology is concerned, or if he had implied that *all* forms of consciousness are socially determined as did Mannheim (postscript to this chapter: 111 - 115), his position might have been judged as, at the very least, entirely consistent with the

strong, causal thesis of social determinism. But Marx had stated the primacy of "the ruling ideas of an epoch", so these constitute the subject of his analysis. He emphasised the "ruling class ideas", "... the ruling ideas of the epoch....the dominant ideas" (CW: ibid: 59). Marx accordingly argued that, we cannot, "in the course of history .... detach the ideas of the ruling class from the ruling class itself." (ibid: 60)

If we cannot detach a class and its corresponding ideas then an analysis of the former entails the analysis of the latter, ie there can be no analysis of their relationship that makes use of the idea of social determinism. It is within the framework of this interpretation that one may appreciate Gramsci's reading of Marxist epistemology in terms of the theory of hegemony (1975: passim) and also Abercrombie's dominant ideology thesis. Marxist social epistemology is concerned with the ideas that shape or influence class struggles and are relevant to either maintaining or overthrowing the capitalist form of society. This particular set of ideas, and not just every idea or form of consciousness, constitutes the focus of its epistemology, as can be seen in his Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte and The Civil War in France.

A further ground for the judgement that Marx did not work with the causal thesis of social determinism can be seen in his willingness to allow that certain sections of the society can, and do, in the process of generating ideas, or forms of consciousness, "rise above" their objective material class positions. The example of the "bourgeois ideologists", supports this claim. He argued as stated earlier (p 94) that,

".... the communist consciousness .... may, of course, arise among the other classes too through *contemplation* (my emphasis) of the situation of this (the proletarian) class" (CW: op cit: 52)

Clearly then some elements of the bourgeois class can, irrespective of their objective, material class conditions, rise above their class consciousness. Through *contemplation* (and not only through the material conditions) they can identify with the yearnings of the proletariat.

But this possibility of detachment does not, I suggest, necessarily imply sacrificing the materialist interpretation of the connection between Being and Thought, rather it makes the connection more flexible less rigid. It may be argued that the flexibility that this reading enables does not satisfactorily explain the contradiction that is involved here. This is because contemplation belongs to the idealistic (metaphysical) sphere. The question then is whether allowing the possibility of the generation of certain forms of consciousness at certain times through contemplation, produces a contradiction in the materialist philosophical basis of the Marxist theory.

The answer may be read from the details that Marx provides in his description of the disintegration of a capitalist society. He argued that, this contradiction can be seen "in times when the struggle nears the decisive hour", whereby

"the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that *a small section* (my emphasis) of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands." (CW: 6: 495)

Thus, forced by the circumstances of the struggle, some elements contemplate proletarian thoughts. The contemplation is related to the objective conditions of the intensity of the revolutionary struggle. It is imposed by these, and is not as such, born of rational contemplation and choice. However Marx did not explain why one bourgeoisie accepts a proletarian ideology whilst another does not. Obviously this cannot be explained by means of class position, for in terms of that no distinctions are possible. Nevertheless, the fact that some allowance is made for an escape from the influences of the class structure, even though only at certain, specific times, counts against the causal sense of social determinism. An account of what is special about these special terms would be needed to serve the Marxist epistemology as a whole.

Marx did hold in the Manifesto, that, some bourgeois ideologists "have raised themselves to the levels of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole" (CW: 6: 494). Furthermore, Kontopoulos holds that Marx concedes that 'the single individual' is not bound by the limits of the nation (op cit: 45) thereby suggesting that the relationship between 'Being' and 'Thought' is not a causal one. Marx further states, in "Moralizing criticism and critical morality" against Karl Heinzein that, "it is 'possible' that particular individuals are not always influenced in their attitude by the class to which they belong ..." (McLellan: 1977: 216). All these statements suggest that there are aspects of mental productions that are not determined by the influences of the class structure and class interests. They all strongly suggest that Marx's determinist theory of knowledge is not a causal one.

Marx did not however think that a whole class can escape (in the process of consciousness generation), from its objective conditions, and its corresponding interest structure. That the classes cannot break away from their real relations is one of the central messages of his critique of Heinzein. Only individuals can do so: that is why he made a clear reference to "a small section of the ruling class", but even for them there are some qualifications, as already argued. So Marx does not attach primacy, in his analysis, to individual action - though he does allow it a place that is not fully consistent with the monolithic claims of, for example, the Manifesto.

Marx, it can be concluded, did not adopt, in his epistemology, the strong thesis which holds that there is a causal connection between consciousness and material life-processes. Such a thesis is a version of the 'reductive materialism' that Marx rejected. The causal, reductive relationship between consciousness and the social structure is not held - at least in the canonical writings of Marx himself.

The analysis of those Marxist philosophers who lay stress more on the "base/superstructure" relationship, may offer a way out of these difficulties. I shall now

briefly examine the theory of the base - superstructure relationship as a variant of the correspondence sense of social determinism, to determine whether it can show that educational knowledge is ideological, and if so, the senses in which it is.

#### 4.4 THE CORRESPONDENCE SENSE OF SOCIAL DETERMINISM IN THE THEORY OF THE BASE-SUPERSTRUCTURE

##### i The General Account

What is left in Marx's account once the causal/deterministic element has been rejected, the conditioning account put to one side is the idea that the production of thought or more generally consciousness - can be understood as a superstructure that is supported by a base: 'the house of knowledge must have foundations'. This architectural metaphor has long been in favour in epistemology - its origins are in the works of Aristotle and in recent times can be found inter alia, in the writings of Carnap, Ayer and early Wittgenstein. Marx argued in The Preface of 1859 that,

"In the social production of their life men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which a legal and political superstructure to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness." (SW: op cit: 503)

This account of the base-superstructure relationship, is another version of the determinist theory. In this account the 'base' is taken to refer to the material foundation, usually viewed in both Marxist and neo-Marxist writings as the economic structure of the society. The superstructure on the other hand, is understood to be those structures that correspond to the base. They consist of the political, social, cultural, religious, and may be other, forms of consciousness. This account constitutes a structural interpretation of the Marxist epistemology. Engels discussed this structural reading of social phenomena including the production of consciousness, at much greater length than Marx. He it was, who disowned the 'mistaken' economic reductionist

interpretations of Marx's social determinism and who defended the theory after Marx's death.

The concept of 'correspondence' is theoretically underdetermined. The implication for correspondence is compliance, so that whatever does not comply with the basic structure of the society, is then ruled out by it. Correspondence between the basic structure of society and forms of consciousness as seen in terms of compliance suggests some definite relationships to the level of the development of the forces of production. Any particular thought or (educational) knowledge seen from the perspective of its correspondence to the basic structure of society, is therefore best understood in the context of its place in the prevailing society and the definite stage of the society within history.

But correspondence only gives a loose indication of the force of the social determinist theory of knowledge production. Taken to its logical conclusions, correspondence merely states the obvious point that each society generates that knowledge which is appropriate to its basic form and level of development. However this is too slight for social determinism. Correspondence does not clearly allow one to isolate those conditions which do, and those which do not explain specific ideas. We have no way of accounting for any knowledge in the society except to say that it complies with the basic structure of that society, which in the final analysis is vague. The force of the 'correspondence' involved in the base - superstructure relationship is not clearly explained by Marx, nor is the nature of the distinction between them. But the account of the social determinist theory of knowledge production in terms of correspondence, vague as it is, is nonetheless of some relevance to the project of examining the ideology of educational knowledge. It does emphasise the significance of the wide social context in which such knowledge is produced. The correspondence thesis suggests that educational knowledge has a functional relevance to the dominant

collective within which it is generated. This view of the social determinist theory promotes a pragmatic interpretation of knowledge production in Marx.

Despite this however, it must be asked whether the correspondence thesis presupposes a causal relationship between the base and the superstructure. What room, if any, is provided by the theory for a non-reductive relationship between the base and the superstructure? Does the correspondence theory in the final analysis blur the very distinction it makes between the base and the superstructure? How does it assist in working out accounts of the ideology of educational knowledge?

While the superstructure is influenced and determined by the base, Marx and Engels nevertheless hold that it in turn influences the base (see for example Marx's critique of Heinzein and Engels letter to Bloch). That is, the superstructure enjoys a degree of relative autonomy, so that the relationship is not one-way. Althusser (1969) argued that there is a need to re-think the specific connections between the two, so that we can, in the words of Hall,

"grasp, simultaneously, the determination by the economic in the last instance and the relative autonomy or effectivity of the superstructures".  
(1977 : 54)

The specific effectivity for Althusser, is to be understood, in terms of the role of the superstructure "in the reproduction of the social relations of production", what he called, the 'ideological state apparatus' (ISAs) and the 'repressive state apparatus' (RSAs). The former was used by Althusser to account for education as an element in the superstructure.

## ii Two Perspectives on the Base Superstructure Relationship

The difficult issues surrounding the base-superstructure relationship can be approached from the perspectives of two different views: "the mechanistic" and "the interactionist", as did Carter(1988). To these Smith (1984), however added a third,

namely Althusser's 'overdetermination' thesis. But I shall look at the first two perspectives since the third is derived from them.

#### a) The Mechanistic Thesis

The mechanistic thesis of the base superstructure relationship holds that, the base, and nothing else actually causes the superstructure. This thesis rests on three main presuppositions (Smith: 1984). One: the division of social formations in terms of 'forces of production', 'relations of production' or 'the economic structure', and 'the legal, political superstructures, and forms of consciousness'. Two: a direct causal dependence by all the other relations of the forces of production. And three: the unidirectional dependence of superstructures on the base. The base is constantly subject to change as new productive techniques arise, while the superstructure is incapable of change except as the effect of changes in the base. The mechanistic thesis is thus a limiting case of the broader causal thesis.

There are however problems with the mechanistic thesis. It is inconsistent with the holistic nature of the Marxist epistemology. The mechanistic thesis implies that the whole of social life is to be understood primarily from the perspective of economics. It is often argued that, Marxism, by emphasising the primacy of the modes of production (and the corresponding relationship between the base and the superstructure), holds that the economy is the only determining factor as far as the generation and production of knowledge is concerned. Some philosophers had therefore critiqued the base-superstructure relationship on the grounds that it reduces everything to the economy, i.e. the reductivism mentioned earlier. Engels, rejected this claim although he, in a letter to J. Bloch, 21-22/9/1890, conceded that,

"Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that ..... people sometimes lay stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principle ..... to give ..... due to other elements involved in the interaction" (SC: 1975: 394).



But as Jones (1984) argues the precise structural mechanism connecting the two is left unclear. However Engels developed an account of the base superstructure relationship even further, when he argued in the letter to J. Bloch (1890) that,

"according to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. " (SC: op cit: 498)

So analyses must be complex and holistic by taking into consideration all the other elements of the structure, i.e. considering the complex inter-relationships of various variables, and locating all of them within a specific context. That way there cannot be a one-to-one relationship between being and consciousness. It follows that the holism of dialectical materialism is to be brought to bear on the base-superstructure relationship just as it must inform any other analysis within the Marxist theory.

Engels (1890), argued accordingly that those who toe the reductive line, simply lack dialectics. This reductionist reading of the base - superstructure relationship considers the base and the superstructure to be distinct and separate - the former determining the latter - i.e. the superstructure is reduced to the base. This reading has been contrasted to the dialectical reading of the relationship between them which insists on the superstructure as returning in Marx's own words to "itself in influence" (a gnomic comment it must be said).

It is difficult to explain the base in terms of the mechanistic account since the latter treats it as a primary and independent explanatory factor, which stands in isolation from the totality of the socio-economic relationships. The productive forces cannot be understood in isolation from their total relationships because they do not exist outside of specific social relations and in reality the two overlap. They interact with other regions of man's productive activity such as the activities of consumption, distribution,

exchange, social co-operation, and even the production and reproduction of forms of consciousness including cultural productions.

It is not clear on the axioms of the mechanistic thesis which aspects of the society belong to the base and which to the superstructure. For instance, Cohen (1978) believes that, the phenomenon of, knowledge can characterise both the base and the superstructure and so, by extension politics and science can as well belong to both. It is hardly disputable that, politics (an aspect of the superstructure of all societies) determines production in for example, international trade, even though that may even more fundamentally be explained by the economic structure and relations. If the demands of world capitalism determined the events of 'the Gulf War', such demands had their political aspects, for example, the need for stability in the Middle East. Economic, political and scientific activities do not fall neatly into just one of the base/superstructure categories.

Similarly the place of science in human societies cannot be confined to either the base or the superstructure. Science, it is argued, generates development. Advanced and productive capacities are largely grounded in, scientific knowledge, and the application of this knowledge to production. So development efforts (particularly in the third world countries) are almost always complemented by heavy investment in science and technical education. As indicated earlier, Cohen holds that knowledge is a constituent of both the base and the superstructure because of its relationship to the productive powers. But science is normally taken to be an aspect of the superstructure, not the base. If it generates economic development by means of new techniques of production and new discoveries then the mechanistic thesis, especially if it is read as having a unidirectional influence, is false.

The mechanistic thesis then, cannot be sustained. So what non - mechanistic account can be given of the determination of the superstructure by the base? Engels believed

that the influence of the economic base is fundamental but only "in the last instance". In The Funeral Speech he claimed that Marx's work only shows that "mankind must first of all eat, drink, ... before it can pursue politics, ..." So the base plays a determining role but only "in the last instance". Even this much more limited account can itself be challenged; questions still remain concerning the actual effects and influences of the base on the superstructure. The relationship despite Engel's attempts to clarify it is still not clear. There cannot, I conclude, be a convincing account of the base - superstructure relationship that treats that relationship either mechanistically or causally.

*b) The Interactionist Holistic Thesis*

This account, as it implies, claims that base and superstructure interact. This interaction is one aspect of the internal relatedness of all the elements within a social totality. It has its origins in Marx's discussion of methodology in his introduction to The Grundrisse, where he argued against those political economists who treat elements of the economy and society in isolation. He said:

"The conclusion we reach is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity." (1973: 99)

In an earlier work Marx provided the basis of this interpretation of the relationship between the base and the superstructure. He considered the internal complexities and interrelations within a single social phenomenon by reference to the organic nature of the sun. It is argued that the sun is a necessary and life-assuring object, for plants, just as the plants are objects of the sun: they are considered as the expressions of the sun's life-giving power and objective powers.

The relationship between the sun and the plant is that of mutuality, not cause - effect. When interpreted this metaphor is intended to suggest that the superstructure, through

the prevailing social relations, influences, non-causally, the base, which 'in the last instance' determines it. Both have some degree of independence from the other. The superstructure has its own effectivity, so it cannot just be reduced to the effects of the basal causation.

The interactionist thesis therefore, avoids the problems of causality that beset the mechanistic thesis. All elements within a society are internally related so that the division between the primary explanatory factor (the base) and other factors which are generated by the former (i.e. the superstructure) is not one of necessity. The superstructure co-exists with the base, in a relationship of interdependence. Such interdependence is fully compatible with there being some areas of social life in which one has the more extensive and profound effects and some areas in which this is true of the other.

The interactionist thesis is sufficiently holistic for the purposes of determining an explanation of the ideology of educational knowledge. An holistic approach to knowledge such as the one with which this work started can thus accommodate the interactionist thesis of the base-superstructure theory. The interactionist thesis however needs further interpretation: the relationship between the base (i.e. the basic social structure) and the superstructure (in this instance 'educational knowledge') is not causal but is one of internal interrelatedness; it allows of various interpretations of the ideology of educational knowledge.

Both the causal and correspondence senses of social determinism are unacceptable except when their respective claims are analysed pragmatically. But a pragmatic reading of both the causal and the correspondence accounts puts these two senses of Marx's social determinist theory of knowledge in the same category as the conditioning sense - which I argued earlier only sets the parameters for understanding the ideology of educational knowledge. Hence an attempt will now be made (see chapter 6) by

reference to the pragmatic reading allowed by the interactionist thesis of the base-superstructure relationship, to propose a theory which will provide an explanation of the ideology of educational knowledge. Marx's theory of the fetishism of the commodity is in this connection enticing and promising.

### **POST-SCRIPT: MANNHEIM ON IDEOLOGY**

Although Marx's ideas are the focus of this study, there are other thoughts on social determination of knowledge which have profound influences in the debate for example those of Karl Mannheim. His general theory of the relationship between knowledge and the social structure centres upon a study of the social and existential determination of actual thinking. He argued that,

"On the one hand, it (the sociology of knowledge) aims at discovering workable criteria for determining the interrelation between thought and action. On the other hand, by thinking this problem out from beginning to end in a radical, unprejudiced manner, it hopes to develop a theory, ..... concerning the significance of the non-theoretical conditioning factors in knowledge." (1929: 264)

Mannheim's sociology of knowledge was motivated by the need for knowledge in the scientific guidance of politics. Social structure is his leading theoretical notion; all other things else in the discussion support it. Mannheim defined the social structure in terms of 'social classes' and 'social groups'. But social class membership is not defined by relationship to the means of production, as is the case in Marxist theory. On the contrary social classes are defined in terms of 'power relations' (including economic and political power), prestige, and social status. As for social groups, Mannheim stated that:

"by these groups we mean not merely classes, as a dogmatic type of Marxism would have it, but also generations, status groups, sects, occupational groups, schools, etc." (1929: 248)

Mental productions correspond to the social structure. But not all knowledge is, for Mannheim ideological; only the non-natural sciences in their qualitative or

interpretive senses are so. These include, the social sciences, historical knowledge, and *weltanschauungen* (the total world outlook of a social group or social class).

Mannheim conceived ideology in two senses: the '*particular*', and the '*total*'. The former comprises, all those utterances the falsity of which "is due to ..... deluding of self or of others". The particular conception of ideology refers to specific assertions which may be regarded as concealments, falsifications, or lies. The total conception of ideology on the other hand, is a '*Weltanschauung*', a total world-outlook of a social class or social group. Mannheim claimed that "the use of the term ideology in the sociology of knowledge is completely free from any moral connotation. The total conception of ideology is the subject-matter of the sociology of knowledge. Consequently, he replaced ideology with the term '*perspective*'. For Mannheim, a perspective is a person's or group's general or whole mode of conceiving things as determined by their historical as well as the social setting. Mannheim hoped, through his sociology of knowledge, to realise the best perspective for understanding the world.

A further basic distinction is that between an '*ideology*' and a '*utopia*'. 'Ideology' appears as thoughts or mental productions of those social classes and groups that have an interest in preserving the present form of society and their power position in it. A utopia on the other hand, is of its nature idealistic. It is any mental production which is produced by those classes and groups who are marginalised from power, and so suffer frustrations from the existing form of society. Utopian ideas are in essence anti status-quo, and they constitute an ideal picture of a form of society appropriate to the interests of the marginalised social classes and groups.

Mannheim claimed that his ideas are not utopian. His theory attempts "to overcome the vague, ill-considered, and sterile form of relativism with regard to scientific knowledge which is increasingly prevalent today" (1929: 237). He believes that his sociology of knowledge escapes relativism because it is relationist. 'Relationism' holds

that all knowledge is socially conditioned and its validity is linked to the social structure through the notion of its instrumentality within a given social entity. 'Relationism' however, does not avoid the pitfalls and problems of relativism discussed earlier (4: 74 - 81). Criteria will still be needed to determine, for example, which knowledge is 'most relevant for the scientific guidance of politics'. Mannheim's social epistemology, for all its attempts to avoid vulgar relativism, still embodies a yearning for the Archimedian position.

One significant aspect of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge is his espousal of the idea of a *free floating intelligentsia*. It is possible he believes, to achieve 'undistorted' knowledge, i.e. knowledge which is unaffected by the social conditions of its producers. He suggested that, by means of a 'synthesis' of different perspectives, and 'determining the best perspective' by a relational analysis, undistorted knowledge will emerge. Mannheim had no hesitation in assigning the role of discovering this undistorted knowledge to what he saw as the "free-floating intelligentsia". The intellectuals are best disposed to attain unbiased knowledge because, unlike any other social category, they do not have a distinctive social class position. This lack of attachment to particular group interests is explained by their own mode of education and procedures of recruitment and by their professional qualities, especially their capacity for rational criticism of all views including the ones they themselves hold. This lack of attachment to any social interest group is what makes the intellectuals free-floating.

Notwithstanding the influence that Mannheim had on the sociology of knowledge his ideas are in need of appraisal. Mannheim's account cannot escape relativism: so his idea of the 'free-floating intelligentsia' is far from compelling. Intellectuals do not rise, Phoenix-like, from the given structures of a society; they too have an education which, *ex-hypothesi* embodies such social conflicts. Mannheim fails to follow up the arguments that can *prima facie* be brought against a theory that allows a socially detached class of intellectuals and yet insists on the fundamental connection between social structure

and the production of knowledge. Mannheim is, himself a good example of a nonfree-floating intellectual, since his sociology of knowledge is grounded in a concern for the guidance of specific forms of society, for example the Weimer Republic. It is the strong, not weak attachment to that form of society, which he felt was being threatened by conflicting political tendencies, that motivated him to theorise about the sociology of knowledge. In developing his own theory of the intellectuals, Mannheim is misled by these interests into creating a space for the production of knowledge outside the context of society and history.

Science and scientific knowledge, are dependent on society in, at least, the generative sense. For example, the economic, political, and social demands of a technological society provide the motivation for the specific pieces of scientific research. Research into the origins of the universe (for example, big-bang theory) is a mark of an economically-advanced society willing to await an economic pay-off from the activities of its scientists. Its wealth may be such that it is willing to accept a gap between research and the determination of a functional role for the results of that research, but such it will anticipate and expect for example, in future technological advances.

Mannheim's reference to the capacity of the intellectuals to produce different arguments in support of different perspectives, may be justified if this is restricted to a point about their critical powers. It does not support the claim that they (necessarily) have weak social attachments. They are not free-floating in the sense of being disinterested philosophical spectators of all time and eternity; they are not Platonic guardians. For his sociology of knowledge allows no logical space for such guardianship.

Mannheim's thesis offers a range of possibilities for the examination of the ideology of educational knowledge that are more specific than Marxist categories. For example the concept of 'social groups'. These are of particular relevance to explaining the



ideological nature of educational knowledge in certain societies in which cultural pluralism is an inescapable part of the definition of the social structure. But the internal structure and the weaknesses that I have schematically mapped out are sufficient to show that, Mannheim's ideas have but a limited contribution to make to the understanding of the ideology of educational knowledge as such.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MARX'S THEORY OF FETISHISM OF THE COMMODITY

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

I have argued that Marx's and Mannheim's accounts of social determination of knowledge are not, of themselves, sufficient for an explanatory theory of the ideology of educational knowledge. That educational knowledge is ideological in virtue of its relationship to the social structure is a necessary but not sufficient condition of the ideology of educational knowledge. But the Marxist theory does provide the general framework from which to analyse and develop specific accounts of the ideological nature of educational knowledge. Since the Marxist theory of the social determination of knowledge does not give an adequate explanatory theory of the ideology educational knowledge, I shall, examine another of Marx's theories: the theory of the '*fetishism of the commodity*', to see if it can do the work. Marx's theory of the fetishism of the commodity is however parasitic on other conceptions of that term. It is best understood therefore by means of reference to the pre-Marxist conception of 'fetishism'.

#### 2 THE TERM 'FETISHISM'

The term 'fetishism' is both an anthropological (Cohen: 1978) and a psychological one (Carver: 1987). It is derived "from discourse about religion" (Taussig: 1980). A fetish religious or cultural object is vested with some - apparent - powers that it, in fact, lacks. But the fetish object is *perceived* as being inherently endowed with those powers. Nevertheless they are mistakenly attributed to the object. The *appearance* of the fetish object is thought to be different from its *essence*. In its appearance the fetish object does seem to have such magical powers even though, in its essence, it lacks them. Whether or not

this relationship between the essential and the apparent characteristics of the fetish object is in some sense contradictory is an issue I shall address later.

The power of the fetish object is seen in the precedence its appearance takes over its 'internal' or essential basis. Appearance takes precedence, in our superficial judgement(s) about the fetish object, over essence: the internal and fundamental qualities of the object without which it cannot be what it is - or indeed what it is claimed to be. It is important therefore that the fetish object is for all intents and purposes, presented and understood in terms of its appearance not its essence. Consequently the essence is hidden, supposedly concealed by the appearance. There is much more to the fetish object than that which appears on the surface.

This idea of fetishism was employed by a number of philosophers, including Feuerbach (1957), when they criticised religion. For them, religion, which they considered as a perfected form of alienation, resides in fetishism. God, according to this critical tradition, was thought to be an invention of men, who assign powers to Him. But these powers are 'false' in the sense of being empty, non-existent or mistakenly attributed since they are lacking in the religious object. The appearance of omnipotence and omniscience, is thought to conceal the essence of religion: a fear born of man's incapacity to properly grasp the laws of nature, social control, and so on. Religion, *qua* fetishism, is presented as non-alienating; even though it is a creation of men, the religious object transforms itself into the master, and hence controls men, thereby alienating them from their own product or potentialities.

I am concerned here with some conditions of fetishism. These are: *concealment* or hiding something with a view to deceive; *disguising*: hiding something but without the intent to deceive; and *distortion*: capacity for transforming the

essential character of an object by adversely affecting it in some manner. I am interested in these ideas as they are manifested in the production of educational knowledge. I shall not examine them in the contexts in which they are most commonly discussed, for example, religious, totemic and art objects.

At their root anthropological and psychological fetishisms are activities in which men engage when seeking to explain their experiences of the world in which they live. An understanding of such activities requires theories of fetishising which place them within a social context; they have a special significance when seen in the context of the many activities in which men make use of, or attach a special importance to, objects. The theory of fetishism must be both social and holistic. Marx's theory - laden usage of the 'fetishism' concept meets these requirements. He uses the term in the context of the commodity-producing society which capitalism best exemplifies. Accordingly it is with regard to the social framework that Marx described the force of fetishism in the commodity i.e. he understood the concept holistically.

Fetishism is then, essentially, a social notion. It is to be noted that my rejection of social determinist theory rests on grounds other than those I shall discuss in this chapter. One of the advantages of social determinism is that, it provides a social framework for ideology. The social relations of a commodity's production appear as objective characteristics stamped upon the product of their labour. A commodity is fetish since it is essentially a bundle of social relationships. So I take the theory of the fetishism of the commodity to be a form of social determinism, and so a plausible candidate for an account of the ideology of educational knowledge. The anthropological account of fetishism regarding the magical powers of a fetish object is not sufficient, though it is necessary for a theory of ideology. The anthropological use of fetishism is individualistic not holistic. It is not grounded in social theory. But the 'magical' powers of a fetish

object are not given. They derive their meanings by reference to a social context, and for this reason 'fetishism' must be located within a wider social and/or theoretical framework.

Carver (1975) believed that Marx was concerned with laying "bare the anatomy of bourgeois society". Marx grounds his analysis into the social context within which people produce commodities and exchange them. So Marx's use of the theory of fetishism is holistic. Commodity production, can only be understood by taking into consideration the forms of society in which it is practised. The social context provides a sufficient condition for the proper understanding and application of the ideas entailed by fetishism. That is, the use of the doctrines of fetishism in explanation of social practices, or the ascription of non-existent powers to entities which do not possess them, is intimately related to the idea of a social structure.

### **3 MARX'S QUALIFIED USE OF FETISHISM**

Carver (op cit) believes that, Marx used fetishism in the sense of the eighteenth and nineteenth century anthropological conception of fetishism. The German translation (1842) of Charles de Brosses's (1785) work on fetishism had a strong influence on Marx. By employing Brosses's ideas of fetishism Marx sought to find an 'analogy' by taking a flight into the misty realm of religion. But he appropriated fetishism to his theory of history, and society, thereby locating it within his general theory. He held that in the realm of religion,

"the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations with each other and with the human race." (Capital: 1: 165)

I understand the 'autonomous figures' to which reference is made here to mean inanimate objects. So Carver states that, for Marx,

"a fetish is an inanimate object worshipped on account of its *alleged inherent magical powers*, an object supposedly animated by a spirit or god. Fetishism is thus the practice of worshipping such an idol." (1987: 81) (My emphasis)

In the view of Marx, something very similar happens "with the products of men's hand", i.e., with commodities. Marx held that commodities are fetish because they are worshipped on account of their alleged magical powers. Like all fetish objects, commodities disguise their essence. I shall distinguish between A's disguising B, i.e. A's hiding B in the absence of any intention on the part of an agent to deceive, and A's concealing B in which case an intention to deceive is involved.

Marx argued for the primacy of the commodity in his analysis of capitalism. Mandel (1986) in an introduction to Capital Vol 1 argued that,

"Just as surplus-value and capital emerge logically from an analysis of value and exchange-value, so too does the capitalist mode of production emerge historically from the growth of commodity production: without production no capitalism can come into existence" (1986: 14)

Marx held that both 'use-value' (the use to which an object is put) and 'exchange-value' (its capacities for generating capital) are necessary to the understanding the role of a commodity in a capitalist society, since in such a society, commodities are produced as economic and social units. Commodities are the elementary forms of the wealth of capitalist societies (Dobb: 1973: 27); commodity production and distribution, are at the heart of the capitalist form of society.

A Marxist commodity is defined as "an object outside us that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another" (Fischer: 1970: 53). Accordingly Marx chose to speak of the fetishism of the commodity (Capital 1: 1: 4: 163 -77). As he puts it,

"this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them." (ibid: 165)

It is axiomatic for Marx that a commodity has both a 'use' and 'exchange' value, i.e. its value resides in its satisfying human needs and (in a capitalist society) its having a value in a market. The commodity, said Marx,

"appears, at first sight, an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." (ibid: 163)

This suggests that there are secrets beneath a commodity's appearance. In this case, a commodity for exchange, is offered in such a way that it conceals its real or essential qualities. I shall comment in due course on whether or not the attribution of this quality to a commodity is intelligible.

Marx claimed that under capitalism, commodities are fetish objects. His aim is to demystify the fetishism of the commodities, the attribution of fetish powers to commodities. A commodity in a capitalist society is made to distort social realities by changing the form of things: i.e. the social relations of production hidden in the commodity. The commodity's appearance differs from its social essence so much so that what is readily visible in the commodity is its immediate appearance rather than the actual essence. The social relations necessary for its production and the central aspect in the light of which its production is justified, i.e. generation of surplus-value are hidden. Only the immediate appearance of the commodity is visible, and it is so in an innocent way.

A commodity is, for Marx, a mysterious object and so it has to be demystified. Each commodity has a "use-value": a utility. But Marx cautioned that, "the mystical character of the commodity does not ..... arise from its use-value" (ibid: 164). "Exchange-value" is the necessary requirement for commodity fetishism by reference to which its mystical and mysterious characters are to be understood.

A commodity is significant in a capitalist economy mainly owing to its exchange-value: it is a source of capital generation. It is, according to Marx, the exchange-value of the commodity which gives it a central place in capitalist economy and society. Commodities as exchange-values create the possibility of a commercial relationship between the producer (the supplier), the distributor and the consumer. These capitalist agents are bound together by the laws of exchange, which leads to capital generation for the producer and the distributor, and some satisfaction, use-value, for the consumer. So the idea of 'exchange-value' presupposes that of 'use-value'. In the commodity-producing societies, the act of exchange is at the heart of the economy.

A commodity for exchange in a market is however a product of labour. It is central to Marx's economic thought that, "as soon as men start to work for one other in any way, their labour assumes a social form" (ibid: 164). Articles of utility become commodities mainly because they are products of labour. But a commodity does not portray, in its appearance, the social conditions of its production or, more specifically, the contradictory relationships between labour and capital or wages and surplus-value (for example profit). These relationships are however, central and in fact indispensable to its production (and distribution), i.e. its exchange-value. Accordingly Marx argued that,

"The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things" (ibid: 165-6).

Even though a commodity is the product of labour which is basically social in character, it is able, when supplied to the market, for exchange, to transform those social relationships which are necessary and indispensable for its creation, into relations between one object and another. The physical appearance of the



commodity though, unassuming nevertheless disguises the social relations of its production. The commodity, as an exchange-value, thus

*"appears as the quantitative relation, .... in which use-values of one sort are exchanged for use-values of another sort, a relation which changes continually with time and place. Hence exchange-value seems something accidental and purely relative; an exchange-value immanent and in, inside the commodity .... seems therefore, a contradictio in adjecto". (Carver: op cit: 43)*

That is, a commodity *qua* exchange-value is a contradiction between a thing and what is attributed to it. The commodity nonetheless disguises the social relationships between men by assuming, according to Marx, "in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relations between things" (Capital: op cit: 165), between two objects in the process of exchange.

The commodity remains, in its appearance, an unambiguous object. But even though its value is 'basically' (though not exclusively) a creation of labour, it does not reveal this in its appearance. Its external qualities of satisfying given wants, as well as generating surplus-value, are projected at the expense of an understanding the alienating conditions, under which it is produced and distributed, guided by the demands of the market (by, for example, profit). As an exchange-value, the commodity states an arbitrary relation for when commodities are exchanged, the assumption is that some interchangeable exchange-values of equal quantities are being traded. But this is not the case because the exchange process disguises the amounts of social labour invested in the production of the commodity as being equal. So, in so far as the commodities have exchange-values, they are not themselves exchange-values and presenting them as such is giving a false and disguising picture.

The commodity is presented in such a way that its physical appearance indicates or shows only half of the true picture. Value, Marx held, can only be created by human labour. (This view has often been criticised by for example Elster, 1986).

But the commodity in exchange 'disguises' the contradictions in the social relationship between labour (the workers) and the product on one hand, and labour and capital (the so-called producers and distributors) on the other hand. This antagonistic relationship is disguised to such effect that not even workers, whose exploitation is so disguised, can discern that it is so. Marx goes on to claim:

"It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Capital: *ibid*: 165).

By means of this transformation of its essence into a seemingly subjective social reality, the commodity is made to appear as being primarily a relation between objects "which exist apart from and outside the producers", a member of 'alien world of objects'. Those relations, which are man's own products, come to rule over him, to "take a life of their own."

As an object for exchange subject to the laws of the market, the commodity appears as an innocent means of realising surplus-value on the one hand, and use-value on the other. For the producer who supplies it to the market it is important in so far as it remains a source of surplus-value i.e. profit or capital. The producer and the distributor supply the commodity to the market essentially as an object of exchange-value, with its potential for raising capital and surplus-value. For the consumer it is crucial only because it is of use-value. He accepts it for what he believes its capacity for satisfying his wants is worth. Neither of the two agents brought together by the commodity in a transaction (the producer and the consumer) see in it any other quality or characteristic beyond these.

In sum: the commodity is made to appear to have certain powers - those of presenting its possible use-values - as a result of which it is produced and exchanged. But its production and exchange are necessarily social in character,

i.e. some social relations of production and exchange are indispensable to its being. So the conditions of exchange take priority, in the doctrine of the fetishism of the commodity, over use-values. Nevertheless 'use-value' is integral to the theory of commodity fetishism even if its import is less significant than that of exchange-value. The latter is central to the capitalist form of society the analysis and overthrowing of which was Marx's chief concern. The theory of commodity fetishism focuses upon the powers and appearance of the fetish object; the identification and analysis of these presuppose a reference to value judgements. This is because people and their beliefs (i.e. their belief about what is in their interests) rather than the commodity itself, are the subject of the theory. In the production of educational knowledge, the subjects of analysis are the beliefs and interests of people as social actors rather than educational knowledge as such.

The essential features of commodity fetishism that I intend to employ in the course of this discussion (especially 8: 138 - 46 and 9: 147 - 59) are as follows. First: the claim to the 'magical powers' of the fetish object; it is in virtue of these powers that its appearance disguises its essence. There is a contradiction in a fetish object between its essence and its appearance. Second: the social character of the human labour which characterises the production of the fetish object is central in this regard. Third: the idea of the capacity of the fetish object to transcend a use-value and become, in addition to that, an exchange-value. This is of significance since the secrets of a fetish object can best be appraised in the light of its being an exchange-value. Every object may have a use-value, but not all objects have exchange-values. Fetish objects always combine the two features in themselves. Fourth: the distinction between appearance and reality which is immanent in the fetish object; I shall argue however, that this distinction is not to be understood as deliberate deception.

As Carver claimed, Marx's arguments for commodity fetishism "are philosophical and logical in character, and are most effectively interpreted and challenged as such" (1975: 39). I follow him in this. I shall now attempt to assess the values of the theory of commodity fetishism for this study. I suggest that its relevance to the production of educational knowledge may have to be assessed in the light of its key characteristics of alienation and distortion. What now is required is an examination of the linkage between commodity fetishism and ideology, in the light of which the respects in which the theory makes space for ideological explanation, may be assessed.

#### **4 FETISHISM OF THE COMMODITY AND IDEOLOGY**

An anthropological fetish object has an idealistic shell, the quality of a spirit. Its physical appearance is different from its essence. As Cohen says "to make something fetish is to invest it with a power it does not in itself have" (1978: 115). By means of the power invested into it, a fetish object is made to distort its real essence in favour of a projected appearance which is, for all practical purposes, a false attribute. The powers of a fetish object are therefore illusory.

Carver (1987) and Larrain (1979) believe that ideology can be explained in terms of its fetish character. Ideologies and fetishism both misrepresent, though not intentionally, the world, and so undermine our understanding of it. A fetish object necessarily *distorts* and *disguises* reality (though not, as I have indicated, deliberately). On this account, therefore, the fetish account of religion and ideology does not depend on the ideas of a "priestly deceit" (viz Bacon's "idols") or "a princely deceit" (viz Machiavelli's "Prince"). Fetishism is the attribution of a quality to an object which it does not possess. Those who make this attribution do not, or at least need not, intend to deceive. Ideology, in the view of Law (1986), both "distorts and conceals" but unintentionally. On this account fetishism is but one expression of the ideological phenomenon.

One way of making a case for fetishism as ideology is by means of the thought that both misrepresent the world but in different ways. Whilst ideology does this by both concealment and distortion, only disguise characterises fetishism. Ideology - or at least some accounts of ideology - makes some place for conspiracy theory and deceit: the concealment of social essence through a view of what is in the interests of a given population. Ideology certainly misrepresents reality; this is however not plain deception. So not all misrepresentations are ideological: deceit, mistaken beliefs, lies are not necessarily so. There may be of course, a conspiracy to deceive as when a dictator seeks to promote false beliefs concerning the actual military build up in a country. A conspiracy which involves X's deliberately acting against Y's interests is not a feature of commodity fetishism; it is the presentation of the object which characterises fetishism and the outcome of ideology to which I claim it is central. An object of fetishism such as a commodity in exchange cannot itself possess the feature of intentionally setting out to deceive in a bid to promote one view of the world at the expense of others with which it is in contest. Fetishising is to be identified in the *presentation* of the object by social agents and an intent to deceive is not necessarily an element of that. So the intent to misrepresent reality is to be attributed, not to the object itself but to the mode of its presentation, or projection, (i.e. its appearance) by human agents. In other words it is attributable to the intentionality of agents who make and offer the object to the market. The knowledge produced in an educational system may be attributed with powers which it, in reality lacks. But the fetishism of that knowledge consists in its manner of production and presentation by, for example, those who hold position of power in the state. Thus in cases where knowledge is used to conceal the essence in its appearance, individual parties to its production and dissemination but not the fetish object in question, carry the responsibility for the concealment. (Objects as such, including knowledge, being unpossessed of intentionality are

*ipso facto* unpossessed of the intentions to distort, deceive, etc.) The account of ideology as entailing the misrepresentation of the world by reference to biases for, or against the interests of some specific collectives (see chapter 3: 85 - 91), is consistent with the main features of this modified account of the theory of commodity fetishism.

So the theory of the fetishism of the commodity will be employed in preference to the thesis that sees ideology of educational knowledge in terms of social determination alone. The account of the fetishism of educational knowledge will be seen not to strictly conform to the account of the nature of commodity (and capital) fetishism. Educational knowledge, I shall argue, is ideological by being fetish in that different curricular proposals represent certain favoured views of what is in the interest of for example, a state, or a party within it. They disguise other interests of other, rival parties. So the theory of the ideology of educational knowledge to be developed here will make some modifications of the Marxist original. Only then can a less ambitious, as opposed to a strong theory of the ideology of educational knowledge, be offered.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE MARXIST COMMODITY

#### **1 THREE CONDITIONS OF FETISHISM OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

The conditions required by the theory of the fetishism of the commodity may be summed up as follows. First: the commodity as a fetish object characteristically possesses both use-value and exchange-value. Educational knowledge, I shall argue, is similar to a Marxist commodity, i.e. a commodity as described in Marx's theory of fetishism. I shall call this '*the commodity condition*' for the fetishism of educational knowledge.

Second: there is a distinction to be made between the essence and appearance of a commodity. I shall argue that the appearance of educational knowledge disguises its essence. Educational knowledge is an object whose appearance disguises the social relationships and so the social essence which is necessary for its production and dissemination. This I shall refer to as '*the disguise condition*' of the fetishism of educational knowledge.

Third: certain 'magical powers' are attributed to the fetish object. These are illusory; the object possesses no such powers. Alleged parallel powers in the case of educational knowledge are located in the connection between the acquisition of knowledge and action. In reality, I shall argue, educational knowledge either lacks these powers, or if present, they are limited and cannot independently account for the actions of those who have acquired such knowledge. I shall refer to the third claim as the '*alleged powers condition*' of the fetishism of educational knowledge.

The three conditions taken collectively give the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge. I shall elaborate on the extent to which each of them

holds in this and the following two chapters. But I shall in this chapter pay particular attention to the commodity condition.

## 2 THE COMMODITY CONDITION

Educational knowledge is in two senses - those of *generation* and *dissemination* - an object which is similar to a commodity. This view does not entail that educational knowledge is itself a material commodity such as is manufactured in a factory.

### 2.1 THE GENERATIVE SENSE

There are social bases which are central to the production of educational knowledge and in the light of which its fetishism will be first considered. Social conditions and social relationships are fundamental and indispensable in the course of the production of educational knowledge. The social conditions include the shared values and beliefs, the economic and political structures, institutional arrangements and the class structure. I argued elsewhere (Indabawa: 1988) that, there is no education without society, for the basic reason that any society seeks to survive and reproduce itself in the next generation and education is one of the most potent of social activities for accomplishing this (Bourdieu: 1977, Apple: 1982).

In so far as educational knowledge plays a supporting, mediating, or even revolutionary role in relation to the form of a society at a particular time and place, it cannot but take a social form. That is because it is defined, designed and transmitted on the basis of the demands of the institutions, sub-structures and processes of the prevailing society. There is a widespread, basic agreement amongst researchers of various political leanings over this basic claim. For example, Young (1971), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Harris (1979), Giroux (1981, 1983, 1988) etc, have, in various ways, put forward this familiar argument.



Both a (Marxist) commodity and educational knowledge therefore, share a common feature: both are generated by the prevailing society. The nature of the interaction between the two is both controversial and contestable. Much depends for example, on the way in which 'educational knowledge' is defined. The commodities that Marx describes are produced by a capitalist form of society. Educational knowledge is produced by all societies that have formal or informal educational arrangements. However a clearer understanding of the fetishism of educational knowledge emerges when a form of society is specified.

## 2.2 THE DISSEMINATION SENSE

The force of the claim that educational knowledge is a commodity is given more clearly by the dissemination than the generative sense. The knowledge that is transmitted in schools, has both a use-value, and an exchange-value; such, in a capitalist society are determined by the kind of exchanges that I shall describe in this chapter. I wish to emphasise, however, that I am only concerned with these aspects of the Marxist economic theory, for a limited purpose: to consider the bases for a just comparison between a Marxist commodity and educational knowledge, as a means to understanding the sense(s) in which educational knowledge is ideological.

### i Educational Knowledge as a Use-value

Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Sharp (1980) among others, have argued that education, in a capitalist society, is a commodity. They had in mind that education, in all societies, is an institutional object to be understood within an institutional context. The basic purpose of all educational systems, in all forms of society is the teaching and learning of particular values, attitudes, beliefs, skills, and so on. As these all have use-values, so does the educational knowledge they, severally constitute.

Educational knowledge has personal and social returns for individuals and for the state. Knowledge, attitudes and values must be continuously reproduced; the first aim of any society is to survive in the next generation. It is fundamentally for this reason that educational knowledge, in general has a use-value.

## ii Exchange, Exchange-value and Educational Knowledge

The state officially defines and sanctions educational objectives as well as the educational knowledge deemed necessary for their attainment. The fundamental and directive principles of the state are expressed in the educational objectives, which in turn bear on the selection of the relevant items of knowledge for transmission to pupils. Educational knowledge is disseminated in the schools with a view to shaping the attitudes and outlooks of pupils as members of the next generation. The state thus seeks to *recover* (2: 41 - 2) its aims and objectives in the promotion of its interests which, of course, it will represent as the interests of all its citizens.

The claims made above suggest a form of exchange. There is here presupposed, a market, some economic agents (producers, distributors, consumers), and articles of exchange, products like commodities. The market may be specified by reference to the institutional frameworks of the educational system; so I shall call it, the *educational market*. The producers in this market are dominated by the state, which is an instrument for the rule of a dominant social collective and its corresponding interest structure. The definitions of the fundamental principles, ideals and objectives of state policy, including education, are derived from these perceived interests. The producers also include the educational policy makers, whose chief task is to draw up guidelines for curricula design. There are also 'experts': subject specialists and academics and professional researchers in government (or related) institutions. The experts, on the basis of the given

guidelines, select, organize, and codify the specific items deemed necessary to the attainment of the directive principles and their consequent objectives. The teachers distribute educational knowledge. The consumers are mainly the pupils. The chief articles of trade in the educational market are beliefs, social values, attitudes, skills, all of which constitute educational knowledge. These are all, as I hope to show, grounds for believing that educational knowledge is a fetish commodity and thus ideological.

Also operating in this market are instruments of exchange. Monetary tools are amongst these, but they are neither the only, nor are they the main instruments of exchange. Public finance (taxation, different types of levies, public revenue, etc) and/or private investment are necessary for the production and dissemination of educational knowledge. Not only will the educational market be a feature of a capitalist society, it will also characterise socialist states and even command economies. The objectives of the educational enterprise and the educational knowledge by means of which such objectives are attained, are consumed and recovered through the distributive networks of the educational market. So the process of exchange takes place over the long-term and must be contrasted with exchanges of a material commodity (including capital). In this kind of exchange the purchase is paid not necessarily in kind but also attitudes, i.e. by promoting in the long term, the desired form of society and all it entails.

Educational knowledge is produced and exchanged for the chief purpose that its recipients shall play one functional role or another in the promotion of the basic principles, aims and objectives of the dominant social collective (i.e. class or group). The directive principles and fundamental objectives enshrined in the educational knowledge are meant to be recovered in exchange for opportunities for personal enhancement, e.g. good job placement, particularly in the elitist non-manual sector which attracts higher income and prestige. To obtain

commodities of a higher exchange-value it is necessary to subscribe to the dominant view of what is in the collective interest.

In such an educational exchange the students are rewarded with diplomas (degrees, certificates, testimonials, etc), that may qualify them both for higher educational tasks and better social and economic opportunities. So in the long-run such a market is supposed to improve the quality of lives of individuals and existing society. Underlying all these transactions in the educational market are powerful assumptions made about liberalism, meritocracy and equality of opportunity, that are alleged to characterise the educational, as well as, the larger market in liberal, capitalist societies.

Various assumptions are made within such a long-term educational exchange. One is that, educational knowledge is capable of bringing about certain states of affairs, which would not otherwise be achieved. Another is that, some of the consumers (who indicate a capacity to re-pay the state in the future, i.e. those who pass the required examinations) are automatically rewarded, through their diplomas, with varied opportunities for self-enhancement, such as upward social mobility. Of course the presuppositions can be contested at theoretical and empirical levels. Here I am concerned with the educational market and its form of commodity exchange.

Educational knowledge in many cases may provide, and be the repository of, the skills, know-how, values and so on: necessary qualities for the functioning and survival of a particular society and economy. This claim is particularly true of a commodity producing capitalist form of society. Educational knowledge can be seen as a commodity, in the simple sense of generating surplus-value. But what is most crucial is that educational knowledge is a productive power which serves further social ends, and these are ends which are fundamental constituents of the

prevailing society. It may be offered to the market for exchange, for example in private fee-paying schools. It serves a dual purpose: it both plays a role in the creation of surplus-value for the proprietors of fee-paying schools and works as a long-term exchange of values, attitudes, skills etc, required for the perpetuation of the form of society favoured by the state.

On such a system of exchange the pay-off or the returns of educational knowledge resides in the furtherance of the dominant national interests. The state sets out to promote whatever it conceives of as being in the national interests by means of its specification of educational knowledge. Hence it places a premium upon education as the specific context and instrument for the dissemination of those interests. Recoverability of these fundamental goals is the *raison d'être* of the production and dissemination (or exchange) of educational knowledge. In this process resides the exchange-value of educational knowledge. Without it, the state would have scant concern for the education of its citizens. A point of caution is necessary here: the proprietors of private schools are clearly not themselves the direct producers of educational knowledge, as are manufacturers of material objects. Nonetheless, most proprietors of private schools belong to the dominant social collective on the basis of whose interest structure educational knowledge is selected. This may not be true in some cases, as in the case of the proprietors of private religious schools such as the Islamic schools or their Christian counterparts in Nigeria. Such schools operate under the specific guidance of the state. But even in such a situation, the teaching of non-sanctioned (so technically non-educational) knowledge which threatens those of the dominant interest structure can be controlled. The censorship of the curriculum and administration of private (especially religious) private schools introduced in Kano State of Nigeria, illustrates the point being made here.

All political states incorporate the dominant interests they represent but frequently, nevertheless appeal to other interests in formulating and legitimating their educational policies. States take some account of significant, though literally non-dominant interest groups in determining the educational knowledge to be designed and taught. For example the emergence of state schooling from the system of factory training and apprenticeship in the advanced capitalist societies coincided with the growth and sophistication of capitalism, and its corresponding political agenda. These, in turn, stimulated further democratic demands such as universal adult suffrage and more generally, increased participation in the institutions of liberal-democratic societies.

Similarly the use of education in general, and educational knowledge in particular, for instrumental purposes in developing third world societies coincided with demands for the expansion of the capitalist mode of production which is superceding its pre-capitalist varieties. The emphasis by the state on training scientists and technologists, for example, as the corner-stone of Nigeria's national policy on education (1981) supports this claim. It should here be emphasised that this general point i.e. those who acquire the educational knowledge should accept the dominant values of the given society, is true of capitalism as for other forms of society. So for example, in a theocratic society such as Iran or Ireland, the basic idea being argued here still holds.

The theory of the exchange-value of educational knowledge has, then, general application. Irrespective of the prevailing form of society within which the state exercises the instruments of government the state itself is still a fetish object because it is an institution that uses, in carrying out the tasks of education, the members of a particular interest structure. The state's policies and actions are not those of the whole society in whose name, they are conducted. They are

essentially policies that are favourable to the ruling or dominant interest structure.

In sum: educational knowledge is an important article for exchange in many societies. But it is, in the strict sense, different from material commodities of exchange, such as are found in the classic examples of capitalist societies. This kind of exchange is significantly different from the one which characterises the commodity markets.

Unlike a material commodity the goals and objectives of educational knowledge are not limited to the generation of surplus-value (in the short-term) and the realisation of a use-value for the individual alone. In reality the actual goals of educational knowledge transcend the normal exchange-value. Capitalist societies, for example, use the production and distribution of educational knowledge to create a submissive work force (Althusser: 1969). In non- or part-capitalist societies the exchange- value of educational knowledge consists in the socialisation of young people into the dominant interest structures and so its survival in the next generation. In both individual and social cases educational knowledge is fetish.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE: APPEARANCE DISGUISES ESSENCE**

#### **1 DISGUIISING THE ESSENCE OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

I follow Marx in holding that 'essence' refers to the necessary (social) conditions of the existence of an object, while the 'appearance' is determined by the basic conditions of an object's use. I shall argue that educational knowledge, by the processes of its production and presentation, tends to disguise its social essence. It is the appearance more than any thing else which accounts for the confidence that the state, and people in general, repose in educational knowledge i.e. its totality.

Educational knowledge is, through its production and dissemination, transformed and its resulting appearance therefore disguises the basic conditions under which it is produced. Yet, in line with the proposed modification of Marx's doctrine (see 6: 119 - 26), educational knowledge does not, of its nature transform anything because it is itself an object, not an agent or an aspect of agency. The process by which its essence is transformed into appearance is important in this regard. There are two different interpretations of this theory of transformation. The first is that the essence contradicts the reality. The second is that the essence appears as, and therefore is, different from the reality. I claim that the relationship is one of difference (i.e. contrariety) and not contradiction, i.e., it is not a logical one such as was used by Marxists in addressing material commodities. I shall therefore argue that educational knowledge is presented in such a way that the appearance is different from, and not contradictory to, its essence. Issues in the dissemination of educational knowledge will be important here.



I shall argue that the aspects of the use - and exchange-values of educational knowledge provide the general conditions for its fetishism. The basic proposition here is that, educational knowledge has both values but, as I argued earlier, in different ways from the respects in which material commodity has both.

It is by considering the network of social relationships at the levels of the production and dissemination of educational knowledge, that its ideology (or even the different forms that that ideology takes in different societies) may be located. Those networks of relationships are disguised by the appearance (i.e. the features) of educational knowledge. The appearance conveys the message that the essence of educational knowledge is to be located in the relationships between objects. So, for example, the essence of what we teach in schools is to be located, *inter alia*, in the relationship between educational knowledge and certification; the certificate is taken to be a reliable indicator of capabilities and performances, both of which are understood in terms of the acquisition of educational knowledge. Passing examinations then appears as the essence of educational knowledge. Such appears, by virtue of the presentation of educational knowledge in schools, to take priority over any other process, activity, or end. It is in this regard, for example, to the relationship between educational knowledge as one about certification and another, that the appearance of educational knowledge disguises its social essence. Beneath such a disguise however, lay the basic goals and objectives of educational knowledge as conceived, designed and articulated by the state or its representatives.

That disguise is similar to the ways in which the social essence of a material commodity is said by Marx to be transformed into a relationship between objects: a commodity or capital for example.

## 2 DISGUISE OR CONCEALMENT

The relationship between educational knowledge as a commodity (one object) and a certificate (another object) is often emphasised. So its essence *appears* as a certificate or certification). I have argued that its essence is social and goes far beyond the acquisition of one or more diplomas. This social essence is manifested in the holder's economic role and so more generally his or her social roles in the society. The appearance nonetheless takes priority in the public mind over the social relationships which are necessary for the very existence of educational knowledge. The social essence behind the production and dissemination of educational knowledge is thus hidden. Whether or not this hiding is 'deceptive', i.e. intentional, will be argued in due course. I here emphasise that the immediate form or appearance of educational knowledge hides its social and political essence. Such appearance plays a role in stabilising and promoting the particular form of society that is agreeable to, and is in consonance with, the prevailing dominant structure of interests. However, because of the fetishism involved here, contradictions begin to emerge. Such contradictions for example, created education in the colonial states of Africa and led to the emergence of agitations against the colonial states. This was so in the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nigeria when disenchanted elites supported and indeed promoted Nkrumah's and Azikiwe's decolonisation struggles. It has been suggested that the role of these colonial elites in the post-colonial states of Ghana and Nigeria, was more in line with the maintenance of the fundamental elements of the state. (But this suggestion is consistent with the view that those fundamental elements were parties to the disguise).

It is the network of social relationships which is transformed into a relationship between educational knowledge as an object, and various educational practices such as testing or examining or (corresponding) objects such as certificates. For example, the supposed mastery of educational knowledge is taken to be

evidenced by passes or failures in examinations and tests. Educational knowledge is accordingly made to disguise the relationships within which context its social essence, and so its ideology are to be uncovered. In Nigeria for example, passing the General Certificate of Education is considered to be the main immediate goal of all those engaged in secondary school education. A fundamental link is presumed to exist between passing the GCE and the achievement of the educational objectives which themselves fetishise the social contradictions among the conflicting collectives in Nigeria. The transformed relationships constitute a diversion from focussing on the social relationships involved in the production and dissemination of educational knowledge, issues which are crucial to understanding its essence in that state.

When the Conservative government in Britain insists on testing seven year olds in the interest of quality production such testing is 'unconsciously' disguising the essence of educational knowledge. That is, the social network that determines educational knowledge is here transformed into a relationship between the testing and the grades. All efforts are then geared towards passing the tests and obtaining good grades. In this process the aim which appears on the surface takes priority over the social ends of KeyStage 1 testing. It in fact disguises the latter because emphasis on testing and examination fetishise the social contradictions hidden by educational knowledge. So the actual essence of educational knowledge is fetishised. By uncovering the fetishism involved here, the disguised relations become clear, the social essence of the fetish object is laid bare.

Though tests are intended to measure the pupils' attainments, this cannot be done without due consideration of the social relations between the social and like-conditions of pupils and teachers, as well as the relationships between the state and schooling in terms of the provision of conditions and facilities which are necessary for high attainment. Without this the tests end up by fetishising

educational knowledge. Tests in relation to educational knowledge are fetish. They are neither ends in themselves nor do they necessarily indicate the quality of the instruction received by the pupils. Realising that this is the case also implies that, the ends are social and relative to the defined educational objectives, as conceived by the governing party and the structure of interests that constitute it.

It is important to stress that, there is here, no conspiracy to deceive. The disguising is the product of a belief, genuinely held, that there is a positive correlation between passing tests and educational quality held by, both the Conservative party and its government.

### **3 CONSPIRACY, DISGUISE AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO FETISHISM**

Harris argued that, an educational system "transmits as knowledge, structured, distorted, misrepresentations of the world" (1979: 2). The phenomenon of educational knowledge is presented in such a way that it disguises the truth of its own essential reality. But I claim that it is not a matter of choice, let alone conspiracy, that educational knowledge disguises and thus becomes fetishised. It does not therefore conceal the social contradictions, within which it is defined, by means of a structure of deliberate deception or by conspiracy, or indeed by a conscious distortion of reality as Harris holds. Educational knowledge is not a deliberate distortion, but it is a kind of distortion (a disguise that is) all the same.

In all forms of society, in all states the dominant power relationships (within social groups or social classes) determine what is selected and transmitted on the basis of their interest structures. That is to say, each state works with whatever it believes is the correct view of the social world. Deliberate deception or conspiracy is not involved here.

I here argue that that which is accepted as the correct view of reality is, structurally disguised by the dialectics of the power relationships involved. So the disguise is not deliberate. The essence of the officially accepted, and so legitimated claims about the world, is transformed into a misleading misrepresentation of that world. Fetishism of educational knowledge persists so long as there are conflicting interest structures, some of which become dominant over others, so that their interpretation of the world prevails and is transmitted as educational knowledge, but without actually acknowledging its preferred judgements and value positions.

The disguise is built into the processes of production and dissemination of educational knowledge. It appears in the structure of the presentation itself: the purported, overt, functional relevance of educational knowledge and the underlying interests that it promotes deceive the policy maker, the teacher, the pupil, the parents, etc, into glorifying the dominant forms of knowledge. Educational knowledge, in its production and presentation is made to appear as given, transparent and unproblematic.

Policy makers, because of their confidence that educational knowledge has the capacity to realise the guiding goals for its production, see in it, no other social quality than its functional or instrumental relevance. They therefore promote educational knowledge as being non-ideological, as bodies of true propositions that have no sources other than those publically available to disinterested enquirers. They are guided by genuine concerns for national interests and the general good that can be realised for all sections of the society as a result of the officially sanctioned educational knowledge.

#### 4 FETISHISM AND THE STATE'S GLORIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The transmission of educational knowledge is for the state, the means of attaining and maintaining the prestige of the state in the eyes of its citizens. By means of such knowledge the next generation becomes attached to, and in effect gives assent to, the particular (dominant) interest structure of the state. All its educational institutions are inevitably in a position to accord the highest prestige to what is taught in schools. Educational knowledge is therefore taken to be a *sine qua non* for all other things else (as indeed is the case in Nigeria's national policy on education, 1981). It is therefore one of the suppositions here that what is taught in schools is presented as being objective (objectively true) in the sense that rational people could not but acknowledge it as such once they have seen the evidence (or more generally, the reasons).

Since such knowledge embodies the skills, and dispositions which are important for the survival and development of the society it acquires a high prestige, indeed it is glorified. It is not, therefore, presented as being open to criticism, falsification and so rejection. That glorification of educational knowledge is one form that the fetishism of educational knowledge takes.

It is revealed through the consideration that the preferred educational knowledge is on the side of the dominant interests. So it cannot be 'objective' in the required sense. There is no Archimedian position from which to judge and compare the contents of different and national curricula. The appearance therefore disguises the social essence of educational knowledge.

There are various consequences of the fetishism of educational knowledge that I shall mention briefly. First, large-scale generalisations about the worth of areas of knowledge, desired skills, moral values and so on cannot stand upon grounds

that are unshakeable. Judgements about what is in the citizens' interests are always contestable. Second: there has been a marked tendency in the study of Education to treat educational knowledge as presuppositionless, itself a production of the distortion of a fetish object. Third: educational goals, aims and objectives tend either to be ignored, not taken seriously, or just taken for granted. In many capitalist societies, for example, the aim of preparation for the experiences of the adult work community is not examined in the perspective of its ideological foundation. These consequences of the glorification of educational knowledge are of the essence of fetishism.

## **5 FETISHISM AND INSTRUMENTALITY**

Educational knowledge as it is presented, is in fact deemed to be instrumental to the preservation and the survival of the state and its prevailing social order. The claimed instrumental essence is usually presented as being non-political even though it is manifestly both political and non-objectively determined. The appearance of educational knowledge comes with the view that it possesses qualities for enriching not only productive capacities, but also, life-chances of people. It hides the fact that instrumentality is a preoccupation, a basic assumption of capitalist and perhaps other - societies - central to their dominant interest structures.

The instrumentalist assumptions are open to criticism. The expressed goals of improving life-chances (via certification for example), disguise the inner, motivating goals which concern the promotion and, defence, of the dominant interests of the state. Such is the case when certification and the rewards it brings are construed as being the chief ends of education. This conception of the ultimate ends of education is however far from universal; it is to be found particularly in societies in which the ideas of meritocracy and social mobility are

central to the dominant interest structure. Certificates prepare one for a 'rewarding' place within the existing form of society, but they are themselves fetish in the sense that they disguise the essence of educational knowledge and the misrepresentation of the world which is contained in the claims made on behalf of meritocracy and equality of opportunity since these are but avenues for maintaining the prevailing social inequalities in the society.

The claims about meritocracy and social mobility under capitalism disguise the social contradictions between classes. Such assumptions render difficult the identification of the social conditions under which educational knowledge is produced; they produce false consciousness. They have the further consequence that, educational knowledge is judged to be objective, in a quite unqualified sense, and that the dominant interest structure of the social class or group responsible for the production of that knowledge, has, as its concern, the general good of all members of the society. This view disguises the social essence of its production. In capitalist, as in all other forms of society, educational knowledge is a fetish object, its appearance disguises its reality. So educational knowledge is 'genuinely' taken as objective, and the dominant interest structure from which its content aims originate stands for the general good of all members of the society. In other words, the claim that educational knowledge is objective, and consists of unbiased claims about the world, is fetish. Such a claim disguises the actual essence of educational knowledge. The latter is transformed into a 'false', *disguising, not deceptive* appearance.

I conclude that the second condition of the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge, i.e. 'the disguise condition', is met.



**CHAPTER NINE**  
**THE POWERS OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Most of the claims I shall assess here do not directly make reference to educational knowledge *sans phrase*. The chief reference is to education, knowledge, and schooling. Behind all these in the theory of fetishism I am examining here, is an assumption about the process of teaching and learning with specific reference to what is taught in the schools. Generally it is assumed that, through exposure to educational knowledge through schooling, pupils automatically acquire the necessary and sufficient beliefs and other capacities which lead to individual enrichment. Implicit in this assumption is that there is a causal link between what is taught to the pupils and their social actions; the conduct of schooling has or is intended to have, desirable social outcomes. I suggest that, theories about education and its relationship to development start off from this basic premise.

The huge investments in education by governments the world over, is a particular example of the assumed powers of (educational) knowledge. So is the emphasis on education and its training outcomes by political parties (especially those of left of centre tendencies) such as the Labour Party in Britain, and the Social Democratic Party in Nigeria. The political forces in question believe that, education/knowledge leads to the realisation of certain desirable political, economic, social and other goals. Educational knowledge is fetish because what in fact is taught in schools is not, in itself, a sufficient condition for the attainment of these goals.

## **2 SOME FORMS TAKEN BY THE CLAIM**

### **2.1 THE HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY**

Governments in the developing world, have, especially since the 1960s, been influenced by theories of education as a human capital machine. Shultz (1964), and, Harbison and Myers (1964), refer to such theories as 'the human capital theory'. The theory is grounded in the utilitarian philosophy and its emphasis on instrumentality and consequentialism. It hypothesises knowledge in terms of economic development; it provides the necessary training for the skills and expertise required by the economy. It is central to the theory that knowledge has the power to expand productive frontiers by opening up new possibilities, through for example, scientific and technological discoveries. The theory can be taken further to claim that human beings are to be understood as capital units. That is, their skills and capacities are available for investment through training.

### **2.2 EDUCATION AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

A further source of claims to the powers of educational knowledge is implicit in James Coleman's (1965) theory of political socialisation and recruitment through education/knowledge. Subjects of study such as Government, Civics, and Social Studies are said to have a causal link to political behaviour. Although all these claims depend, among other things, on the effectiveness of the teaching, in general they tend to attribute powers to educational knowledge.

Likewise a number of philosophers of education, in particular Freire (1972), who is chiefly concerned with adult literacy, are convinced that educational knowledge empowers people politically and economically and so provides the conditions for the enrichment and liberation of their cultural practices and political awareness. Empowerment, in the view of Freire rests on what he calls 'conscientization' or consciousness-raising, which is a political objective achieved by people-oriented mass literacy schemes. If correctly designed, a literacy

programme, raises the consciousness of the masses. These then are deemed to be genuine, and not illusory, powers of educational knowledge.

But the relationship between consciousness and educational programmes is not transparent. It is not clear whether the relationship is causal and if not, the nature of that which it is supposed to be is also not clear. It is odd that Freire a philosopher much influenced by Marxism, holds that educational knowledge, which in the Marxist tradition would normally be held to be a superstructure derived from a base, will itself have an independent determining effect on yet some further form of (political) consciousness. The Marxist proposition, the basis for all sociology of knowledge, is here turned on its head and appears as its own very antithesis. The degree of influence or determination of the one on the other is not clearly stated. What needs to be substantiated therefore is the view that education, which I take to be one form of consciousness, generates other levels of consciousness. Freire will then need to show, which of the two levels of consciousness involved here is primary and why. This seems to be a dilemma particularly if education is cautiously taken to be an activity in which pupils are taught to attach meanings to the world: just what is the relationship between learning and consciousness? Freire pays insufficient regard to the complex social and epistemological questions that enter into the calculations for the production of some required form of consciousness. His view runs contrary to a theory of the holistic nature of knowledge production.

Freire's problem is epistemological. As Habermas noted, the dilemma here is that,

"the investigation of the faculty of knowledge is itself knowledge, and cannot arrive at its goal because it is this goal already." (1972: 7)

### 3 ACCOUNTS OF THE POWERS OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

#### 3.1 CAUSAL CONNECTION BETWEEN BELIEFS AND ACTIONS

One theoretical basis of the claim that educational knowledge possesses powers is the principle of *recoverability* of the dominant interpretations of reality which have been vested in educational knowledge. Recoverability, or the demand for the fulfilment of the educational goals that influence selection of educational knowledge, is central to the fetishism of educational knowledge. It is assumed that, once the mind has been fashioned in a desired way, the likely result is behaviour or action which is consonant with the goals of the teaching that makes up a student's schooling.

What must now be examined is the strength of the claim that knowledge has powers. There are two issues: the nature of the connection between the beliefs acquired as a result of teaching and the actions of those who have acquired these beliefs; are the beliefs so acquired *sufficient* to produce the social actions whose desirability is built into the fundamental educational objectives? I shall first address the issue of the relationship between 'power' and 'knowledge'.

#### 3.2 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

There are two possible accounts of the relationship between power and educational knowledge within a society. It can be held that the political structure determines both the educational system and so what is taught. On the other hand it may be thought that the acquisition of educational knowledge itself produces (or more strongly causes) political, moral social actions. It is this latter relationship which is basic to the view that powers inhere in educational knowledge.

The claim that educational knowledge has specific powers has implications that must be examined. First, it is essential to centre on the idea of 'power'. 'Power' is a relational term; its holders have power(s) to affect the lives of others. The idea of power in the social - though not the natural sciences arises only in the context of social relationships. Social or political power is a relationship between three social forces. *Agents* of power, exercise power over subjects; they have requirements of the subject's actions and the means to have these requirements enforced. *Subjects* of power are those over whom power is exercised - more precisely their actions, beliefs and interests. *Objects* of power are the states of affairs whose realisation is sought by agents through their power over subjects. Such objects of power relate the activities of agents to those of subjects. The object of power may, for example, be a policy enactment. The enforcing party, the agent of power, might be the state, for example, the legislative and executive arms of government, while the subjects of power are the citizens (including, of course young people) on whose shoulders falls the burden of compliance with the requirements of the policy enactment. Teachers as enforcers and implementors of directives (pertaining to educational knowledge) are both agents (in relation to pupils) and subjects (in relation to the state).

Many other relationships characterise social groups e.g. influence over, care for, friendship and so on - though these may have certain power characteristics, power is not of their essence. The social relationships within which power is expressed, are of a special kind. The agents of power are necessarily related to the subjects through the objects of power. The enforcing agents 'cause' the subjects to relate to the objects e.g. by bringing it about that they have to ignore their own interests. The agents of power stand in a position of advantage relative to the subjects of power, so that, the former systematically affect the actions, dispositions, thoughts and preferences of the latter. So the subjects of power are

disposed to act in a particular way given their relationship to the enforcing agents of power.

On the fetish account, the nature of the social relationship involved here is not one of an agent's exercising an influence upon a subject. On the contrary it is a causal one; it is not a determinism in the sense that is opposed to freewill (i.e. the subject could not do otherwise). The subject's freedom of action is constrained given the relative position of advantage possessed by the agent. Under the deterministic regime involved in the relationship between the three forces, the object of power defines the relationship between the enforcing agent of power and the subject of power. As a result, the relationship becomes one of control on one hand, and submission on the other. The subject of power, (vide Lukes 1976) acts in compliance with the objects of power and according to the standards they put in place. The subject's freedom of action and autonomy is negated by reference to the constraints imposed on him by the agent of power, so much so that, in so far as the objects of power are concerned, the subject's choice of actions are not even thought of as constrained. Given the subject's relation to the powers of the agents, he/she cannot escape from the designed path, he/she just does what the agent requires. Power implies this kind of a strong causal relationship.

The control of the subject of power by the agent of power is not one which is rooted in the deliberate use of force or coercion. Such control is expressed in the nature of the social relationships between the two social forces. It is such that, given the agent - subject relationship and the particular conditions as arranged, or made possible the subject of power is just disposed to act in terms of the object of power. So: being coerced is one possible instantiation of the ways in which people act in response to the agents and their objects of power. If the subject is coerced or forced to do something the force comes from the

(structural) limitations imposed on him/her by the former forces to which he/she stands in a relationship.

#### 4 THE ALLEGED POWERS OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Following these considerations, the powers of educational knowledge are located in the perspective of *power to*, rather than *power over*. Power, as employed in the discussions of fetishism implies the following: an object has the power to, bring it about that the (related) subject comes to hold certain beliefs, value positions, etc. It is the potential or the capacity of the object (or commodity in the case of educational knowledge) to cause the direct achievement or the realization of some given objectives, ideals, goals, targets, and so on. As argued by Fardon,

"seen from the perspective of power, the problem of ... knowledge revolves around its capacity to achieve results, especially through forms of ideological incorporation or hegemony". (1985: 6)

Educational knowledge has the capacity to achieve results - beyond, say, the passing of examinations - in relation to the objects of knowledge which are under the control of the agents. The dominant structure of interests, or 'the dominant ideology', is thus under the control of the agents of power who both identify 'appropriate' objects of power, and the specific educational knowledge that is to be employed in realising the objects. So the view that knowledge has certain powers, is synonymous in my view to the claim that it produces certain effects. It is in this regard that knowledge empowers people: so educational knowledge equips people with ideas, new possibilities, an enlarged awareness and so develops their potential. Thus it enables people to act or behave in ways which otherwise they would, indeed could not have done. Their social actions are the effects of causes: the beliefs vested in the pupils by the educational knowledge to which they have been exposed over the years. There is in this case, a direct cause-effect relationship between beliefs, judgements, etc and social actions. To hold, then, that educational knowledge has certain powers in terms of its

capacities and effects, is to propose a causal connection between beliefs and actions.

The claim that certain powers inhere in education can be found in Nigeria's National Policy on Education. Section 1, sub-section 7 (1) states that,

"Education will continue to be highly rated in the national development plans, because ..... any fundamental change in .... any society *has to be preceded by an educational revolution.*" (1981: 8 - my emphasis).

It further states that, "efforts will be made to relate education to overall community needs" (ibid: 8), and that the teaching of certain subjects "will enable pupils to acquire knowledge and develop skills" (ibid: 17). Education, and specifically educational knowledge is here given a primary place in the attempt to achieve various social, political, economic, and other objectives. Such views are a concrete and political expression of the claim that educational knowledge possesses wide-ranging and impressive powers.

## **5 ALLEGED POWERS OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT**

### **5.1 MERITS AND DEMERITS OF THE CLAIM**

There are merits and demerits to the claim that educational knowledge has powers. If educational knowledge has the powers attributed to it, i.e., its possession is a cause of social action (of a type expressed in the subjects of power), then the truth of a fundamental thesis of much sociology of knowledge (that material conditions 'determine' thought) may have to be re-examined. This is because we have here a thesis that action is determined by thought, a position which seems to reverse a central main claim of the sociology of knowledge.

Educational knowledge may be a double-edged sword. Educational knowledge may be put to a number of uses apart from the officially intended and sanctioned



ones. For example, it is open to uses that are either not in line with the interests of the state or are even opposed to them. In a dialectical sense it generates a negation of the official view of reality which is at its very foundation. (For example, colonial curricula were designed to produce elites who would, in their social actions support and indeed promote the basic interests of the colonising states. Although it can be argued that they indeed played such a role, nonetheless their education also led them into waging a struggle for decolonisation.) Furthermore, when pupils in Nigerian schools are taught Economic theory, at the secondary school level, the objective might be to make them disposed towards understanding the laws of the free market, the supremacy of market forces such as demand and supply. But the understanding of such forces does not mean that they are internalised to meet the stated educational objectives and the unstated but implicit state goals. The contrary might even be true: pupils may understand and question the concept of 'market forces' and their mechanisms in a way contrary to the intentions of the state's educational system. The pupils may begin to question the validity of the theory particularly when lived conditions do not support it. Thus the pupils might master this educational knowledge and employ it in the criticism of those dominant structures who were the agents of power in the first place.

Educational knowledge thus allows for two contradictory outcomes at the same time. The disposition to act in a particular way coexists with a disposition to act in the contrary. In fact it sometimes generates its own anti-thesis. The actions which follow the teaching of educational knowledge, may well be the result of an inter-play of many factors (as an holistic theory of knowledge implies). There is no guarantee that one particular course of action will be the result of an exposure to educational knowledge.

Thus the powers of educational knowledge are not guaranteed i.e. they may not yield what is intended. So such powers as the ones attributed to educational knowledge are unpredictable. If so, then a state may find them, for all practical purposes, more of a myth than a reality. Moreover, as I have emphasised, it is not clear that the beliefs acquired will bring about the desired effects.

Educational knowledge therefore, in its overt form fetishises these crucial points about its essence. Whereas the immediate and apparent form of educational knowledge may appear as socially-disinterested (objective) knowledge divorced from politics and ideology, it is defined, selected and organized in such a way as to disguise the network of social relationships and contradictions in the civil society. It is presented as having some powers which in reality it lacks, or if it possesses them they are limited and are not sufficient to produce action for the realisation of the given objectives of the state. Thus the government selects a curriculum for certain purposes (believing that the educational knowledge has powers to achieve the preferred aims), but that knowledge is used by the pupils in such ways that these aims may be frustrated.

It may be concluded that the following is entailed by these considerations. Educational knowledge, in reality, either lacks those powers ascribed to it, or it has a limited capacity which can only work in conjunction with other forces and phenomena in the society (such as those discussed under the epistemological structure in 4: 81 - 8), to pursue whatever goals are feasible for it, irrespective of their being in conformity to, or in contradiction with the state's interests. In an attempt to substantiate this point, I shall now examine the causal connections that are alleged to inhere in educational knowledge. In doing this, I shall refer to the epistemological structure, which I discussed earlier (4: 83 - 4).

## 5.2 DOES EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE CAUSE SOCIAL ACTION?

Is there then a causal link between the beliefs held as a result of acquiring educational knowledge and social conduct? The structure for recovering the educational objectives which are built into the production and presentation of educational knowledge suggests that educational knowledge is functional. By this I do not mean that the full explanation of the relationship between educational knowledge and social action, is given by 'functionalism' understood as a theory. The idea of 'recoverability' raises a crucial question as follows: is educational knowledge a necessary and sufficient condition for the realisation of the fundamental ideals of the state that in the first place generates it? I shall first discuss the question of whether the relationship between educational knowledge and social action is causal and then proceed to examine the view that the relationship is a functional one.

Whilst thoughts and beliefs are essential precursors to action, they are just one set of epistemic factors involved in determining action or behaviour through the epistemological structure. That structure comprises other elements to which action stands in a holistic, complex and not unitary, one-way, relationship. Such elements include the following: beliefs, emotions, attitudes, values, desires, dispositions and motives. All these conjointly determine particular behaviours or actions, at given times. The prevailing social, political and economic conditions place a limitation on how these beliefs, motives, etc, mutually interact and together with ideologies, historical experiences, religious affiliations and so on provide the grounds for an understanding of social behaviour. The effects of the interaction of those epistemic elements must be shown to be clearly and directly related to educational knowledge - understood in an holistic context - if the modified claim of the powers of educational knowledge is to be established. Beliefs acquired as a result of teaching cannot relate to action, in the required

way, in isolation from motives, desires, etc, and from concrete social, political, economic and other conditions.

It follows that there is no single, simple, casual connection between our social actions and what we have been taught in schools. No single item of knowledge considered in isolation is a necessary condition of a specific social action. Beliefs acquired through educational knowledge must be located within a particular holistic context. Their effects, as distinct from the effects of other epistemological factors and socio-political conditions, cannot be determined independently of that context.

Specific beliefs alone are necessary to the explanation of particular social actions; they are not however sufficient and so cannot be said to be the cause of such actions. I conclude that educational knowledge, understood as the acquisition of beliefs is not a cause of social actions. It is however, a necessary component that causes social action. Educational knowledge is but one necessary condition which taken together with many others constitute the sufficient conditions or causes of social behaviours or actions.

I use 'the necessary condition' for action in the strong sense to refer to those conditions without which a particular process or events, social action for example, will not happen. But a necessary condition is not here treated as a cause. By 'sufficient conditions' I mean the aggregate conditions that constitute the cause of a particular process or event. Sufficient condition is I claim, the totality of the necessary conditions. So a sufficient condition(s) is/are to be understood holistically. Educational knowledge is then a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of social action.

## **6 THE ALLEGED POWERS CONDITION: CONCLUSIONS**

The claim that educational knowledge has powers to produce social action is central to the idea that it is fetish.

I have centred in this discussion upon belief and taken educational knowledge to consist of such beliefs. Beliefs however, are but one class of elements within a complex structure, the several parts of which, in interaction are necessary to explain how people come to accept the objectives of a state educational system. There is no causal link between isolated beliefs and such acceptance or attainment. The causal link will be the sum of all the necessary conditions (which make up the sufficient conditions for social action). So if particular beliefs are necessary to such objectives they are not sufficient and so, in themselves are not causes of such achievements. The view that beliefs have the power to produce social action or more generally to meet the objectives of a state educational system, is fetish.

**CHAPTER TEN**  
**THE THEORY OF THE FETISHISM OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN**  
**GENERAL**

**1 THE THREE CONDITIONS OF THE FETISHISM THEORY**

The three conditions of the fetishism of educational knowledge just examined in the preceding three chapters (129 - 59) collectively produce the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge. It is to be noted that each of the three respective conditions has been satisfied, in the case of educational knowledge. Educational knowledge is in respect of the first condition (i.e. the 'commodity condition'), likened to a Marxist commodity although it is not, of course, a physical commodity. It has been shown that the generative sense applies. In relation to its dissemination, educational knowledge as an object is offered for a specific kind of exchange (chapter 7: 129 - 37). The commodity condition therefore holds.

The second condition ('the disguise condition') has also been shown to obtain. (8: 138 - 46). It has been argued that, educational knowledge has two contrasting dimensions: essence and appearance. The appearance disguises the essence. The social essence, and the network of social relationships which are indispensable to its production and dissemination have been shown to be transformed into a relationship between educational knowledge as one object, and other objects and processes. The distortion condition therefore is met.

The 'powers condition' is also satisfied. Certain powers are assumed to inhere in such knowledge; it has been argued (9: 147 - 59) that these powers are hypothesised. They are not genuine attributes of such knowledge. The powers attributed to educational knowledge are illusory, though that students acquire in schools when appropriately related to their emotional attitudes, religious commitments, personal ideals and the overall historical realities of their society, especially the prevailing social, economic and

other conditions, are productive of, and hence also provide explanations of their social actions.

So the three conditions for the fetishism of educational knowledge hold. The theory therefore offers an account of the sense in which such knowledge is ideological. The fetish qualities offer one explanation of the ideological nature of the official knowledge that is selected and transmitted in schools, is provided by its fetish qualities.

## **2 THE UNITY OF THE THREE CONDITIONS OF THE FETISHISM OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

Fetishism provides an explanation of the sense(s) in which educational knowledge is ideological. The first indication of the ideology of educational knowledge is found in the basic features of educational knowledge itself (see 2: 32 - 42). Educational knowledge has a clear link to the idea of an ideology; it is selected in the light of alternative views of the social world which are available to the education policy makers and planners, acting on behalf of the state. Plurality of cultures and hence understanding of reality and interpretations of the social world are important pre-requisites of the production of educational knowledge. The selection of subject matter will proceed according to criteria held to be important by the existing state, i.e. its legislative and executive arms.

What follows then is that, the production of educational knowledge is itself inherently ideological. Educational knowledge is defined and selected by reference to the prevailing structures of collective interests (cultural, economic, political, spiritual, and so on) that serve to identify a particular society. Those interests (and the cultural actions that characterise them) are, it follows, necessarily linked to some functional (though not necessarily 'instrumental' or 'utilitarian') structure of purposes, goals and objectives.

The dominant interests structure and the political forces that give it public expression determine what shall be taught in schools. A link exists between the interest structures, power relations and the alleged powers of educational knowledge, which the state uses in order to realise its ultimate goals. It is within the terms of that linkage that knowledge is selected for transmission in schools.

The fundamental social, economic, political commitments of the state determine the goals and objectives of the educational system in general and so of the curriculum in particular. These do not seem to allow educational knowledge an escape route from the influences of the social structure. In many states such principles are contestable especially as they relate to the selection of educational knowledge. This is further ground for judging educational knowledge to be fetish.

A note of caution needs to be struck here: the connection between educational knowledge and the interest structures is not a straightforward one. The background ideals may, in some cases be inconsistent. I have argued elsewhere (Indabawa: 1988) that the five national ideals that inform the Nigerian educational policy are contradictory and so cannot stand to inform a consistent policy. For the present discussion this has the consequence that, some ideals must take priority over others. Those which do prevail are stressed and projected as being for the 'common, general good'. Such a 'good' has no status beyond the outcomes of such contests (or conflicts) - or, indeed, the fact of consensus when it does exist.

In effect, the arguments above make a place for the idea of a dominant ideology which is articulated and promoted by the dominant interest structure in line with its interpretations of the national interest. A state projects a range of value positions on which it is alleged there is consensus; these positions are those of the state and its interpretation of the national interest. In the light of this (supposed) consensus curricula are determined; some interests will not be represented. So some interests are relegated



in favour of the dominant interests which express themselves through the medium of national goals.

Educational knowledge therefore transforms the numerous contrarities and contradictions in citizens' understanding of the social world in which we have an (assumed) consensus. In all but the most 'closed' and 'isolated' societies such consensus does not exist. Thus fetishism occurs right at the beginning of the process of knowledge production. But the fetishism does not stop at the level of goal definition and selection of educational knowledge. It also features in the final product, whereby educational knowledge is made to fetishise its real social essence.

The respective contents of the plurality of understandings and interpretations of the social world that are supposedly reconciled, are subject to the definitions given them by the structures of power relations both within and without each of the pluralities. Dominance and hegemony play a central role in the definition of educational knowledge. By their very nature both educational knowledge and its processes of production fetishise many social relationships and social contradictions. I shall elaborate this point in chapter 12 with particular reference to Nigeria.

However some critics may criticise the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge on a number of grounds. Some of these possible criticisms will now be examined.

**CHAPTER ELEVEN**  
**A CRITIQUE OF THE THEORY OF THE FETISHISM OF EDUCATIONAL**  
**KNOWLEDGE**

There are possible criticisms of the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge. There are problems concerning the relativist consequences of the theory, the relationship between educational knowledge and national interests, the identification of fetishism, and fetishism and the economics of education. In the light of these I shall re-examine, and attempt to develop, the theory.

**1 RELATIVISM AND THE FETISHISM OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

Relativism, in its various forms, raises well known problems of the scope and range (and so alleged universality) of both general and particular propositions. These problems have themselves raised issues of the claimed universality and validity of the beliefs, and the theories of which they form part, such as are taught in schools. Do these problems - and some at any rate, of their resolutions have consequences for the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge? I have understood fetishism as a holistic theory grounded in cultural relativist considerations. Is it the case that the theory itself has relativistic problems?

As a specific account of the ideology of educational knowledge, the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge presupposes social and philosophical contexts. The selection of items of knowledge for inclusion, in what is taught in schools is conducted within such a context. The context allows for the variability of beliefs as candidates for educational knowledge. As an explanatory theory, it is articulated on the basis of this over-riding philosophical commitment.

As has been already argued, any specific selection of educational knowledge is given by an interest structure. The account of interests involved in the definition

and designing of educational knowledge is value-laden. As I have indicated there are often, especially in plural societies, many such interest structures. Each social collective has its own manifest interests (its set of judgements of what is in the interests of all members of the collective). Social collectives are thus centres of the articulation of interests. There is a difference between a unitary collective and a society. The latter contains, in some cases more than one collective. The structure of interests of any social collective comprises interests which are consistent with its own views of the world (*weltanschauung*). The interests generate certain objectives the attainment of which are deemed necessary to the collective's identity and survival. These interests thus function in the same way in relation to each social collective's preferences, priorities and basic goals. And this is certainly a sense in which the theory of fetishism is non-relativist.

Nevertheless the variability of the interest structures and so of social collectives, raises the question of which of these is to take priority over which in the production of educational knowledge. This raises a problem of selection, and hence a problem for curriculum development; there can be conflict between the various social collectives within a state. So whilst the function of fetishism is unvarying there can be considerable variation between the (educational) forms it takes even within a particular state.

Only one of the structures of interest can dominate at a particular time. The state is the site for the struggle between the social collectives, as well as for the promotion of the interests they respectively represent. They therefore struggle with each other for recognition in policy matters, including the definition and designing of educational knowledge for the whole society. Which becomes dominant depends on the prevailing form of society. Thus primordial structures of loyalty such as religion, ethnicity, regionalism or statism, and so on, may play a dominant role in policy matters, including education, in the traditional form of

society. The pre-capitalist forms of society define their goals and fundamental background ideals on the basis of which one religious collective or ethnic group or an alliance of some of the primordial forces, attains dominance. More sophisticated patterns of interests such as those of economically advanced states and their related cultural, political and other factors, take centre stage in the policy orientations of capitalist and socialist states.

In theocratic forms of society, such as Iran, The Vatican, and to some measure Pakistan and Ireland of the early years of this century, the underlying ideals on the basis of which curriculum matters are defined and designed, are primarily religious and spiritual. Whereas in a hybrid form of society, such as the developing social formations of Africa, a combination of factors that accrue from the ascending and decaying forms of different social collectives, feature in the definition of the basic objectives within which educational knowledge is designed. Thus the concern for development, and some adherence to a certain form of decaying primordialism (i.e. the pre-capitalist values and value positions such as ethnicity, sectionalism, religion and so on), leads to a mixture of background interests for the educational system.

Whichever fundamental objectives, of whatever social collective, are to dominate the state will depend on the level of development of the collectives' corresponding form of society. So social groups and/or classes and their interests constitute the focus for understanding the educational knowledge transmitted in a modern society. The interests of the social classes may not however be expressed, and in most cases they are more implicit than explicit. Educational objectives can, in one way or another, be explained by means of the class interests even if these are overt. In hybrid forms of society, such as many in Africa, the basic structuring of the social classes is different, both theoretically and empirically, from those in advanced capitalist societies. The class structure is

compounded, it is, in hybrid societies, complex owing to a residue of some pre-capitalist values and practices. So the role of social groups and the numerous primordial interests they represent remains. In such a situation, the fundamental objectives which define educational knowledge, represent a marriage of the decaying and emergent forms of society. Educational knowledge therefore becomes, in its appearance, similarly hybrid. That is fully consistent with fetishism, since, on its premises, only one dominant interest structure can define and design a coherent educational programme to be pursued by the state in schools.

Relativism then is a universal feature of curriculum planning. Relativism as a universal feature of educational knowledge production then, gives additional grounds for holding educational knowledge fetish. One conclusion that may be drawn here is that if relativism does not damage the argument that educational knowledge is fetish, it must at least give grounds for showing that whichever educational knowledge that has been produced relativistically has a limited legitimacy. This is because whichever collective interests prevail, that state's policies for educational knowledge are bound to have limited legitimacy viewed *sub specie aeternitas*. The point then is how the limited legitimacy is to be understood and explained in relation to the fetishism of educational knowledge; I now go on to claim that the limited legitimacy of educational knowledge provides an argument which can be used to confirm the theory of fetishism.

## **2 THE LIMITED LEGITIMACY OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

The critic of the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge now argues that the conclusion drawn from the analysis of his/her first criticism, i.e. limited legitimacy of educational knowledge, shows that educational knowledge is not fetish. Educational knowledge is not fetish on account of this criticism, because people can follow its relativism to understand its limited legitimacy, and hence

they may easily come to recognise that, it does not disguise anything, nor does it transform any other thing, nor is it presented as a commodity, *qua* fetishism. I now respond to the limited legitimacy criticism.

Education, it has been argued, "is a matter of learning the ropes, not of untying them or discovering who is holding them" (Harris 1979: 81). The state is an ontological unit itself to be understood in terms of a dominant interest structure. In the production of educational knowledge, the varied interests within it may be consulted, but only the dominant ones are fully represented at the state level. The consequence of this is that those which are not represented, but to which an appeal is made, are less regarded, so that educational knowledge reduces their status. Thus the legitimacy of such knowledge is limited to those collectives which are represented at the expense of the others. So far as members of those collectives whose views of reality and interpretations of the social world are not carried or conveyed by educational knowledge are concerned, the official educational knowledge has, for them a very limited legitimacy. Educational knowledge endorses what is already dominant in virtue of which its framework is therefore basically reactionary (i.e. it preserves the status quo).

There is an interesting paradox here: there is a disjunction between the framework of educational knowledge (one of the chief legitimising forces of the existing social order) and those educational objectives which emphasise education as an instrument for social change. In some contemporary societies, especially in the developing countries, the guiding educational objectives are themselves heavily weighted in favour of the promotion of social change. The paradox is interesting in the context of this study since, its very existence might suggest that there is something wrong with the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge. I shall now attempt to show how the *limited legitimacy*

argument affects the fetishism of educational knowledge in a constructive, rather than in a destructive way.

How is 'legitimacy' to be understood here? Legitimacy is often seen in terms of political authority. It is not an epistemological notion, but a political one (it is not primarily a question of reason and truth). Accordingly educational knowledge will seem to be legitimate if it is sanctioned and authorised by some body which is entitled to do so: the entitlement will usually be that of a government or bodies delegated by it. A politically-legitimated curriculum policy is not only determined by, but also promoted by a state. To say educational knowledge is legitimate implies that it is so sanctioned. The national curriculum of England and Wales, for example is sanctioned by the 1988 'Education Reform Act', being an Act of Parliament, an authoritative political instrument of the state in Britain. Likewise the curriculum that flows from the National Policy of Education (1981) is legitimated by the Nigerian federal government.

There is, however, another view. The alternative view being argued here understands legitimacy in terms of acceptability by the citizenry rather than in terms of political authority as it is often taken to be the case. Political authority is an aspect of the prevailing form of society and its power structure. Those who reject the dominant interest structure, are marginalised by the state's power relations; they are subordinated groups. Political authority however does not determine the acceptability (or understood worth) of what is taught; it only determines that it must be taught. The worth of any object - Marxist commodity or educational knowledge - must at least in part depend upon its value (functional or otherwise) for those who would use it, i.e. its acceptability. So for example, the study of Shakespeare cannot be legitimated by a politically quite properly - constituted enactment that it be studied. Those who reject such study may be marginalised in the sense that in not studying the plays, they receive no

certificates. The exercise of political authority no more legitimates study of the plays than it legitimates the raising of taxes for the manufacture of biological weapons of war. A necessary condition of legitimation in both cases is the acceptability of the policy enactment by citizens. X's being decreed by a properly constituted authority is not synonymous with 'X's being legitimated, though there may in fact be a regular correspondence between the two. On the contrary such exercise of political authority raises and in fact legitimates, the desire to address its legitimacy by members of society.

The legitimacy of educational knowledge therefore, does not rest uniquely on either political authority, or the plurality of alternative definitions of educational knowledge *per se*. It is, the intentional rather than the involuntary acceptance of the official version of knowledge that confers legitimacy upon it. For educational knowledge to be legitimate, for a state schooling system, it has to be willingly accepted by members of all the collectives in the society. Otherwise whatever legitimacy is claimed for it, is limited. The legitimacy of educational knowledge comes not from a political act but from the acceptance of the outcome of the political act. So the view that educational knowledge is (on many occasions at least) of legitimacy is justified by the fact of its acceptance. Then, we may say, that the curriculum has limited legitimacy - it is restricted to the members of the dominant interest group. It may be that, in some states, the legislative instruments that provide for private schooling (of for example, particular religious groups) are a recognition of that.

As far as the members of subordinated interest groups are concerned, the state authorised educational knowledge is open to contest. It is contestable. Its legitimacy, sanctioned as it may be by the legal authorities is limited, for there are always some alternative views of reality that spring from conflicting structures of interests.



The limited legitimacy thesis adds support to, rather than challenges, the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge. Educational knowledge is accepted by the various sections of the society as a result of the authority and power employed to disseminate only that which is in accord with the dominant interest structure. It is this that is hidden, and so its limited legitimacy. It is the presentation of the entire curriculum than can come to be seen as non-contestable: though in pluralist society, that is a liberal democracy, that might be difficult. Making people aware of alternative views of the world through the curriculum, will jeopardise and threaten that which is taken for granted to be educational knowledge in the interests of all sections of the society. Moreover that so-called national interest is in fact not put to test by any principle of popular participation. Limited legitimacy provides then, a strong argument for the view that educational knowledge is fetish. It is a central case of what I have called the 'disguise' condition.

Limited legitimacy supports rather than destroys the claims of the fetishism of educational knowledge despite its fundamentally relativistic shell. Accordingly the characteristic of limited legitimacy can indeed be taken as a quality of the fetishism of educational knowledge which supports rather than counts against the theory.

The consequences of the limited legitimacy arguments and the failure of the critic's case against the theory, are both products of an understanding of societies (or at any rate most modern societies) in terms of conflicting social groups and classes. Fetishism is confirmed by the argument for limited legitimacy because educational knowledge, being an expression of the dominant interest structure, has to be presented as an aggregate of the interests of all sections of the society. Such knowledge is considered as an embodiment of the 'general good', whereas

in reality it is not. Fetishism is thus a quality which educational knowledge has to possess if it is to secure and demonstrate any form of legitimacy with the subordinated interest groups. By so doing, it attempts to legitimate itself, by means of fetishising its actual social essence.

However, it is not the case that the legitimating process implies a deliberate deception or conspiracy (8: 140 - 42). Curriculum planners do not deliberately disguise the dominant interests by dressing them in a pretentious garb called the 'general good'. They are professionally and educationally equipped to work with this limited perspective. Their consciousness is limited to the objective conditions. Such a limitation significantly increases the likelihood of a blinkered curriculum. The legitimacy arguments therefore strengthen rather than weaken the fetishism of educational knowledge or its claims.

### **3 NATIONAL INTERESTS AND EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

Another possible criticism of the theory that educational knowledge is fetish is that it cannot be sustained since there are, at all times and in every society, some minimum agreement about some basic or fundamental principles, i.e. national interests. The critic argues that, insofar as what is taught in schools is determined by such national interests (which are the common goals of the society presumably accepted by all members) educational knowledge cannot be fetish. In such a case, it is argued, educational objectives and educational knowledge do not disguise any dominant interests.

However this criticism cannot refute the theory in question. On the contrary the points it raises are aspects which further confirm the claims made by the theory. National interests may be taken to entail those things, the accomplishment of which is deemed to be necessary for the survival of the society. To articulate a national interest is to assume a consensus over given and central issues. Although

there can be considerable agreement about certain basic conditions for the survival of a society, interpretations of the specific areas of agreement are open to contest. The legitimacy of what is to be taught in schools is thus based on claims to a consensus of interests, out of which national interests emerge. National interests, certainly those defined with any degree of particularity, can be contested. Even in the case of limited agreement about national interests such as the survival of the nation there will always be a degree of vagueness that creates a space for disputes. For example, there is more or less universal agreement about the need for justice and fair-play for all, the rule of law, and so on; there remain however some disputes about the interpretation of these principles and desired ends in the every day life of a society, and many other similar matters. The fact of such disputes is problematic for the notion of 'national interests'.

Consensus in the definition of the national interests, and the specification of educational knowledge that flows from them, fetishise the realities of social life. The actual interests that such definitions and specifications serve to promote are not those of the nation or the society at large. They are only assumed to be so, since the definitions and specifications are proposed as if they are the products of a national consensus. As a result, the interests of the dominant social collective(s) are made to appear as natural and in the interests of all sections of the society. If these national interests are genuine, the chances of their being theoretically inconsistent are always there. (I have argued for this elsewhere Indabawa: 1988 in regards to the defining national objectives of Nigeria's national curriculum.)

Interests spring from, and are centred around, social collectives. It is hardly plausible that a nation as distinct from a national group - to which national interests are attributed - can have an interest structure of its own, except in a

limited sense (which must be clearly spelt out), i.e. as distinct from the scattered and conflicting interest structures of the various social collectives that comprise it. This is clearly illustrated in many plural societies of the third world, such as Nigeria, where attempts are geared towards the production of a single national identity out of the various nation-states which comprise the so-called 'nation'. Nigeria is not a single nation. It is itself a nation-state. To claim the contrary in relation to curriculum matters is to further justify the view that educational knowledge is fetish because it disguises the various problems about the relationships between nations and nation-states.

The case is not that national interests are shown to be non-existent by the fact of conflicting interests. National interests may indeed exist, but only in certain limited cases. For example, that policy which produces least conflicts or is likely to improve the lot of the least advantaged, or the majority, may be held to be in the national interest. However even if it is so held, such a value judgement cannot be protected from contestation by the other competing claims to policies alleged to be in the 'national interest'. The conception of 'national interests' thus essentially focuses upon one notion that of a social collective's values. Such a conception does not allow for, although it thrives in the name of, all sections of the society, all those social units which comprise the nation.

These arguments point to the fetish nature of that educational knowledge which has been designed, selected and disseminated on the basis of assumptions about non-conflicting national interests. The consensus, on the basis of which the national interests are defined, is a consensus that is largely assumed. It either does not exist or if does it is subject to interpretation. Either way the idea of a national interest employed for the purpose of drawing up a national curriculum is contestable due to the plurality of candidates from different social collectives, as well as the contradictions between them. So national interests or national

ideals or objectives (from which educational knowledge is defined, designed, and selected) disguise the actual interests that they promote. They do not represent the aggregate interests of all sections of the society, but those given by the dominant collective's structure of interest.

The problem of false consciousness in relation to the fetishism of educational knowledge also enters at this point. Since collective interests are prior to educational knowledge, it is important to consider the issue of perceived, versus real interests and the role they play in the fetishism of educational knowledge. The claim that interests exist prior to the production of educational knowledge conceals some difficulties. The first difficulty resides in the distinction between real and perceived interests, what in the Marxist tradition is referred to as the problem of 'false consciousness'. For instance, if educational knowledge is to assist in the development of the potentials, and talents of the individual, then it is odd to suppose that, one can know his/her own interests before he/she is educated. But if, as I argued, his interests are revealed to him through the process of education, then interests are the products rather than the causes of educational knowledge. Wherever false consciousness occurs it would seem to be inappropriate to talk about the fetishism of educational knowledge. Unless we can be clear of the position of the defining interests of the production of educational knowledge, in terms of their being effects or causes, the question of the fetishism of educational knowledge cannot even be raised, let alone settled. Moreover, the claims of the theory will seem to have little relevance in a situation where social actors possess interests as a function of their membership of a given social collective, since paradoxically they may be then in no position to determine their own interests unless they have first been educated.

The above argument no doubt involves a paradox: interests are both causes and products of the acquisition of educational knowledge. But that is not a paradox

which can invalidate the claims to the fetishism of educational knowledge. For in the first place, the argument derives its plausibility from a consideration of individual rather than collective interests. All the claims to the fetishism of educational knowledge are in regard to the latter (collective) not the former (individual) features of interests. Individual interests, though important in that they do much to shape the form a human life takes, are nonetheless, less relevant to the definition and designing of educational knowledge. A social collective is, in the first place, defined partly by reference to its views of the world, its own place within it, and hence its objective wants and preferences in relation to its own definition of the current situation. So whilst the paradox does seem to arise in the case of individuals it fails to occur in the case of social collectives.

It is not, moreover, plausible to attribute truth or falsity to interests. Claims that something is in someone's interests can indeed be false, but hardly is it the case that those interests themselves are true or false. This however does not mean that the explicit interests of a collective cannot be mistaken, nor that they are fixed, nor that they are true. What is the case in relationship to the selection of educational knowledge, is that, the truth or falsity of the claims to what is/are in a collective's interests are secondary to the collective's perceived interests. False claims (that 'X' is in C's interests) can function for the collective as can the true ones: false or mistaken claims to interests can be productive of educational knowledge. The fact of mistaken interests: perceived as against real ones, is germane to the case for the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge.

All this implies that a distinction has to be made between genuine and perceived interests (3: 66 - 8). If the perceived or expressed interests are valid for the collective (i.e. they are genuine) then the usefulness of educational knowledge as an instrument for achieving some results cannot be sustained. There is a danger here of an infinite regress: i.e. we have to know those real interests of a collective

as distinct from mistaken or false ones prior to designing an educational programme. However this infinite regress promotes, rather than denies or challenges the view that educational knowledge is fetish. Since interests are determinable ahead of education, we must be clear about what they are. But in order to do this, we have to be clear about the actual distinction between the perceived and the real interests. Achieving such clarity requires the identification of both the correct and the objective perspective (i.e. the strategy to employ). It will also demand identifying the disinterested party or persons who are entitled to say which of the perceived or real interests are to be employed in the production of educational knowledge. But there is no Archimedian position from which to determine the distinction between the real and the perceived interests. The regression continues, i.e. we have got to resolve certain problems (for example, whether our assumed interests are real or just perceived) before we come to a view about the question of the nature (i.e. real or perceived) of the interests involved in the production of educational knowledge. Claims regarding real and perceived interests depend to a large extent, on subjective factors, but not objective factors such as power relations in the society. It follows that the claim that 'X' is in our interests may be mistaken. If so, 'the alleged powers condition' for the fetishism of educational knowledge, works effectively in this case. The infinite regress can be stopped, by a procedure which is rational, but does not depend on, an epistemological realism. For example, among other strategies, this can be achieved by a democratic convention which allows for a popular participation in the determination of the real interests of the social collective and the society. Nevertheless the fetishism of educational knowledge finds additional support, in the occurrence of such an infinite regress so long as it is not stopped by such a political procedure.

What happens to the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge if it can be shown that there are no grounds for believing that what is assumed to be in

our interests is groundless? It seems that it makes little or no difference whether or not the underlying interests that produce educational knowledge are real or perceived. Either case provides a ground for accepting the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge. If the expressed interests used in designing educational knowledge are false in the sense of not being a true representation of the real interests of the collective, then there is a problem of false consciousness . Such a possibility strengthens the case for the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge. This is because, there must be sub-divisions or sub-cultures within the overall structure of a society's interests. Such sub-cultures may be engaged in a struggle for hegemony within the larger society. A section of the dominant collective will necessarily dominate all other sub-cultures. Hence its perceived interests are presented as the interests of the whole dominant collective. The argument for fetishism is even stronger in such a case since the interests of both the subordinated sub-cultures within the ruling collective as well as those of the subordinated collectives are disguised. Educational knowledge in such a case is clearly fetish.

#### **4 THE IDENTIFICATION OF FETISHISM**

The critic now argues that there are problems about identifying the fetishism of educational knowledge, problems that are potentially damaging to the theory. The critic argues against the theory of fetishism that, it is important to address the issue of whether and how the fetishism of educational knowledge may be identified by the students and their parents i.e. the recipients of educational knowledge. There are, the critic argues, some meta-theoretical points here. It seems following the arguments in the previous section, that a fetish object cancels itself. If the fetish object conceals its essence, then the theory of fetishism of educational knowledge disguises its fetish nature. To understand this theory therefore, one needs to be located outside it. In other words if the theory (the fetishism of educational knowledge) is a good one, then those who are its victims



are in no position to corroborate it. This means that, the recipients of educational knowledge cannot, given the theory, identify what is, and what is not fetish about the knowledge that has been transmitted to them. By extension therefore, no one who happens to be part of the context for the production and dissemination of educational knowledge can identify that fetishism either. Since we are all in one class or the other, today, then we cannot identify it.

A response to this criticism is here put forward. The curriculum planners who employ their 'expertise' to design educational knowledge which is appropriate to the given objectives will believe that that particular curriculum knowledge best serves the general good. The perception of Nigeria's educational policy makers who genuinely think that the national policy on education is there to promote the general interests of all Nigerians is an example. Likewise the teachers who are just agents in the transmission of educational knowledge hardly are in the position to identify the fetishism in educational knowledge. It will be inconsistent for them to promote what they know has the chance of serving interests counter to their own. On the one hand the teacher, as with the curriculum planner, is incapacitated politically, as they are reduced to passive agents, rather than active beings. This imposed passivity deprives them of the capacity for identifying the fetishism in educational knowledge. On the other hand, however, in their position as specialists, knowledgeable authorities, they possess critical powers, which they may indirectly exhibit in the course of the dissemination, the delivery of educational knowledge. Their practical, active life in the society is bound to lead them to generate alternative claims to the world. Unconsciously the latter may feature in the dissemination process.

The pupils whose interests are assumed throughout the process, are in no position to make the fetish/non-fetish distinction. They are in no position to judge that the appearance of educational knowledge disguises its essence. The

question then, is whether the force of the theory is reduced, or even negated, by the fact that its credentials are systematically, and not just adventitiously, hidden from the majority of the population.

Identifying the fetish nature of educational knowledge, can only be achieved from without the context of the production and transmission of educational knowledge. Since these are the contexts which feature in the production of knowledge in general, it follows that, nobody who is involved in educational knowledge production or dissemination can escape from the grips of the fetishism. This leads to the thought that, no one, at least in the society in question, can discover or identify the fetishism of the educational knowledge. So the theory is unverifiable in fact because it cannot be established by anyone. The theory can only be verified solely by means of relativism and this seems to contribute to the case against it.

These arguments can be met as follows. In the first place, the form of consciousness that is transmitted to the pupils, is less important for the development of a critical mind than their daily lived experiences within their objective social condition. It may be suggested that the fetish nature of educational knowledge can be identified, both theoretically through an examination of the social forces that explain it, and empirically by means of assessing its practical effects. Both are possible only by reference to an holistic structure of cognition and action. The strategy of a democratic convention within the ambit of a just state can be considered as another response to the present argument.

Secondly an inability to determine the truth of a claim is not necessarily the same thing as showing it to be false. On the contrary this inability can be taken as evidence in favour of the theory since it is consistent with the view that people

(especially curriculum planners, teachers, pupils and parents) have to rely on the appearance rather than the essence of educational knowledge. When they commit themselves to producing, transmitting or pursuing educational knowledge, they do so because of the overt superficial goals associated with the acquisition of educational knowledge. They hope it will result in the achievement of those expressed goals. They do not take it upon themselves to untie the ropes. They insist on learning the ropes. But all this tends to confirm rather than deny the fetishism of educational knowledge.

The difficulties in identifying real, as distinct from, perceived interests is of no explanatory significance for the fetishism of educational knowledge. It is indeed a difficulty for the theory of collective interests, but it does not affect the theory in question, particularly because what are alleged to be the real interests can always be challenged. There are, in the claims about a collective's real interests, good grounds for accepting the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge as a valid one. The regression which I argued bedevils any attempt at identifying what the actual, real, interests are, for the purposes of educational knowledge production, helps to strengthen the claim of the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge that the perceived interests are presented as real ones.

Thus fetishism is identified not uniquely by the force of what people learn in schools, which is itself fetish, but by a combination of the effects of both what they learn in school and their practical lives. It is that which partly explains the usual description of certain abstract and theoretical knowledge acquired in school as being 'merely academic'; such knowledge is either completely on a par with actual lived experiences, or is at least supported by the latter.

## 5 FETISHISM AND ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION

Another criticism may be that the fetishism of educational knowledge amounts to no more than a re-interpretation of the Economics of Education. The critic argues that such a criticism is because the theory here developed is predicated on the Marxist theory of fetishism of the commodity. One of the three conditions of such fetishism makes use of some important aspects of Marxist economic theory: exchange-value, use-value, surplus-value, commodity production, the market, and exchange mechanisms. Attempts have been made to show that, educational knowledge has structural similarities to a Marxist commodity (see 7: 130 - 37).

Understanding educational knowledge as a Marxist commodity is supported by Cohen's reading of the Marxist economic theory, as applied to education. Knowledge for Cohen, is a productive power, a commodity that enables the achievement of certain ends, for example manpower training for more efficient and productive labour. However, it is not clear for a critic, whether (educational) knowledge as a productive power can be regarded as fetish, since those associated with the educational enterprise do not understand knowledge in this way; they see it as a means to such ends as occupational efficiency. So if educational knowledge is fetish it is not recognised as being such. The pupils and the parents, the community, educational planners, and the government, have the goal of occupational efficiency clearly in view. So educational knowledge in this regard fails to meet the Marxist criteria of fetishism. On the whole then, the theory adds up to no more than a reinterpretation of the economics of education. In that regard it can only be persuasive if backed up by some empirical data. In the absence of any such data the critic concludes that theory is unsuccessful. The question, then, is to what extent can this criticism and reinterpretation affect the theory.

I argue in response to these arguments that, the use of certain aspects of the Marxist economic theory does not itself entail that fetishism must be seen as an aspect of the economics of education. The labels attached to the theory do not matter if its basic claims can be shown to hold, as I have argued they do.

Certainly one of the conditions for the theory relies on those aspects of the Marxist economic theory cited. But one should not lose sight of why that is so. I have argued that those theories that seek to understand the ideology of educational knowledge as rooted in 'crude' social determinism are unacceptable; consequently I have argued that fetishism provides a much stronger account and richer understanding of ideology in its educational setting. The original anthropological account of fetishism is, as I argued earlier, (6: 116 - 19), on a par with social holism, the method I use throughout this study. Hence the use of Marx's theory of fetishism, which I have argued is consistent with the present study's basic methodology of social holism. The Marxist view of fetishism, as opposed to the original anthropological view of fetishism, is holistic since it has been situated in the light of his economic, political theory, as well as his theory of history. Of course Marx was trying to de-mystify the notion of capitalist commodity, just as this work attempts to de-mystify the nature of educational knowledge as an ideological object which is accordingly to be seen as a fetish.

The aspects of the Marxist economic theory that have been employed in developing the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge, are necessary as tools for a better understanding of the theory's claims. It cannot be read in isolation from the rest of the theory, so it does not constitute a reinterpretation of the economics of education. The use of those aspects of the Marxist economic theory, is therefore to be seen in that light. Moreover the Marxist claims cannot be appreciated if they are treated in isolation from the whole interest structure

of a social group. The holistic shell of the theory insists that its claims are to be assessed in their full complexity.

The argument that the theory of fetishism is a reinterpretation of the Economics of Education can be used to strengthen (and not undermine) the claim that educational knowledge is fetish. It is true that the goal of skills development through training is clear to and accepted by all engaged in education. That is to say, the pupils, the teachers, the parents, the community, and the government, are clear right at the beginning of the process about this basic goal. But they (teachers, parents, etc) are also clear about self-enhancement and personal development as basic goals. It is, in other words, widely believed that skill acquisition through training is a basic goal of education as is self-enhancement. These widely held beliefs are generative of fetishism of educational knowledge. That much I have just argued. So the instrumental goals of educational knowledge (acquisition of skills, manpower training for an efficient work force, and provisions of opportunities for self-enhancement) take priority, for those in the business of education, over the central goals of submitting to and supporting, the prevailing form of society. This prioritising occurs in such a way that, the latter is hidden, fetishised as a result of the forceful presentation of the former.

To assert or even argue for the position that the main aim of teaching educational knowledge is for the provision of skills and technical knowledge, is itself to confirm its fetishism. This is because these are never ends in themselves. They are means to some other more fundamental aims relevant to the promotion of the prevailing form of society, from which educational knowledge is generated in the first place. It this fundamental end which constitutes the essence of educational knowledge. But the emphasis on the conscious and intended goals tend to disguise this end, and so fetishise educational knowledge. The actual essence of educational knowledge is therefore much more fundamental than the

instrumentalist belief allows. That essence is not merely the production of an efficient work-force, for such is only relevant to society insofar as it plays a role in the reproduction of the economy, the culture, the politics, etc, of the prevailing society. So long as only the instrumental goals of educational knowledge are visible at the expense of those fundamental ones, it is a fetish.

Moreover, even if the production of manpower resources and the provision of opportunities can be considered ends in themselves, with no further goals hidden, educational knowledge still remains fetish. This is because the attribution of such powers to educational knowledge works on the false assumption that the acquisition of skills through years of exposure to educational knowledge, as evidenced by a diploma, amounts to efficient performance. This assumption fetishises the conditions for efficient performance in the economy and society. It sees educational knowledge as the sole or even the main causal factor in that regard. But it isolates other political, social, economic and even psychological factors that contribute to the development of such instrumentalities. All these are hidden, and so educational knowledge becomes fetish on that score.

Educational knowledge exhibits its fetish qualities through another assumption with which it works: that it produces opportunities for self-enhancement (the development of individual potentials) through a diploma, the mark of success in the process of schooling. Ronald Dore (1976) and Ivar Berg (1970) among others have convincingly argued that this assumption to be false. This further confirms the fetishism of educational knowledge; there are no causal connections between opportunities for self-enhancement and certification. At best a diploma may serve to improve one's chances of a lucrative job, among other individual opportunities. This, however, is never automatic. At least not in a recessed economy, or even in the economies where the number of the certified is higher

than the capacity of the economy to absorb them into the work force. At any rate such a failure, as far as the capitalist form of society is concerned, is functional to the prevailing social order to which educational knowledge fundamentally owes its existence. The intention to attain high levels of employment is not the only use of educational knowledge. Another such use is the relationship, implied in, for example, Nigeria's Social Studies programme, between educational knowledge and the production of good citizens in a democratic society. As Isyaku (1987) discovered, in a study of political consciousness and education in Kano, Nigeria, there is no significant causal connection between being a good citizen and what one learns in the school. Exposure to educational knowledge does not ensure the performance of one's civic duties, just as lack of it does not prevent one from being a good citizen. Educational knowledge is at best a catalyst. It does not therefore take a primary explanatory status in relation to civic duties and political functions in a society. To assume the opposite is to further fetishise educational knowledge.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### FETISHISM OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION

#### **1 THE NIGERIAN STATE, SOCIETY AND ECONOMY**

Nigeria, a west African country, is, as a geo-political entity, a British colonial creation of the opening years of the twentieth century. The very foundation of Nigeria was itself ideological in at least two regards: firstly, with regard to cultural or primordial forces such as ethnicity, religion, regionalism and statism, and secondly in relation to the values of capitalism. These two ideological forces tend to make social phenomena in Nigeria, holistic and complex. Consideration of both of these ideological forces is essential in policy formulation, including the production of educational knowledge. I shall explore both of them and their relations to the fetishism of educational knowledge in Nigeria.

##### 1.1 'PRE-CAPITALIST' IDEOLOGICAL FORCES

The first of Nigeria's ideological foundations relates to its diverse historical, religious, ethnic and linguistic, and cultural factors. The British state had designated for its merchants, places such as Lagos, the southern and northern areas as its protectorates, in 1861, 1885 and 1886 respectively. Prior to 1914 when the Southern and Northern Protectorates were merged and named *Nigeria*, there were only scattered, pre-colonial states and societies, around the rivers *Niger* and *Benue*. The multiplicity of pre-colonial states is an important point in understanding the background to the inter-play between ideological forces in contemporary Nigeria.

## i Muslim Northern Nigeria

Prominent among the pre-colonial centralised states and societies which constituted Nigeria was the Muslim 'Sokoto caliphate' in the north west which made up about two thirds of what was to become northern Nigeria. The Sokoto Caliphate was itself a replacement in 1804 of the Hausa States which flourished from the 10th century (see Last: 1967, Adeleye: 1971). The Sokoto caliphate was established by the *Fulani* (one of Nigeria's ethnic groups), as a result of an Islamic *Jihad* (holy crusade) led against Hausa pagan and semi-pagan practices in government, economy and society, particularly those of the Hausa aristocracy, in the opening years of the 19th century. The Hausa States were a more or less loose confederation of fourteen semi-autonomous states. There was in the north east the 'Kanem-Bornu' empire, another Muslim state. Its inhabitants were the Kanuris and a few other ethnic groups. The two states comprised much of what was to be called the *Northern region*.

What united these two pre-colonial states was, chiefly, the Islamic faith, which characterised the Kanem-Bornu empire by the 11th century, and Hausaland by the 15th century. An Islamic treatise on government was produced for use in Kano, one of the leading Hausa States in the 15th century (Fika: 1978). Islam was the state religion and was taken as an *Aqeedah* or ideology and *Shari'a* or code of fundamental laws. Both states had, in the pre-colonial era, forms of administrative and judicial systems. The people of both kingdoms were mainly merchants and farmers, whose trading escapades brought them into contact with the Muslim Arabs. Thus commerce and industry were firmly rooted in those states and were the basis of trading links with the outside world. European commerce and later colonialism thus found conditions ripe for external trade. They had no difficulty building on the business and enterprise cultures and structures already on the ground.

## ii Non-Muslim Northern Nigeria

There were in the lower north or middle-belt, a number of many small minority groups such as Jukuns, Kadara, Angas, Igala, the Kingdoms of Gongola: Bura/Pabir, Kilba and Marghi. These were stateless societies, and were run on various forms of communal arrangements. Most of these societies were scattered around the middle belt (sandwiched between northern and southern Nigeria) and they remained independent until colonialism was established in the Nigerian areas. The members of these societies were mainly pagans, who practiced various traditional religions. Although they spoke different languages, these communities were united by the absence, in most cases, of a centralised authority. These societies were at the heart of the intense search for a separate 'middle-belt' identity, as distinct from the dominant culture in both the north and the south, which dates back to the late 1950s when demands for a Middle-Belt region were studied by 'Wilinks Commission'.

## iii The South and Mid-Western Nigeria

The 'Yoruba Kingdoms' (Oyo, and Ife in particular) in the south west and the 'Benin empire' in the southern mid-west were other centralised states that colonialism merged with the non-Muslim societies referred to above. Both of these groups of states bordered the Atlantic ocean. The Yoruba Kingdoms, particularly Oyo, flourished from the mid-ages in the least up to the 1830s (Law: 1977). The 'Benin Kingdom' was a further multicultural society in which the Bini people dominated, but in which there were other groups such as the Ijaw and the Urhobo. Both Yoruba and Benin Kingdoms maintained some quasi-democratic systems of government with clear demarcations between its various arms. The Yoruba kingdom of Oyo in particular was reputed for the 'checks and balances' in its system of government. In religious terms the Yorubas were split between Islam and Christianity, and had a sizeable number of adherents to traditional religious beliefs and practices. (Ayandale: 1979). The Yorubas

"shared a common history and such cultural bonds as belief in a common origin, ..... widespread intermarriage within the tribe, and the possession of Pan-Yoruba *Orishas*, tribal deities" (Coleman: 1958: 25).

But they are split into different clans, such as the 'Ijebus', and the 'Egbas'.

#### iv The Igbo and other Communities of the South Eastern Nigeria

In the south east were the Igbos together with a host of minority ethnic groups such as Ibibio, Efik, Ogoja and Ijo. The ethnic groups in the south eastern Nigerian areas lived in stateless societies in the sense that they lacked centralised authorities (Ikime: 1980, Afigbo: 1972). The Igbos however remain politically the most significant of the groups in the south. They were united in religion, culture and in economic and political organisation. As Anene argued "the pervasive reality of the supernatural world" was so crucial to the Igbos that "religion, law, justice, and politics were inextricably bound up" (1966: 12). They were run on an 'age grade system', which allowed for mass participation in decision and policy making in the community. Each of the age grades had some political, economic and moral responsibilities. The elders occupied the highest place in decision making and monitored implementation. The idea of a single ruler for the entire community was thus alien to the Igbos. The minority communities in the south east were ( with a few exceptions) similarly governed.

Nigeria was therefore founded on the basis of diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, political and economic groupings. Hence the emphasis, in public policy, the economy and social life, on 'unity in diversity', and the search for a united pan-Nigerian national identity. This point is crucial to matters of the production of educational knowledge (Denga: 1980: 123).

## 1.2 CAPITALISM AND NIGERIA

Colonial imperialism created many new states in Africa. Colonialism itself can be represented as an attempt to overcome contradictions in the capitalist mode of production. As a colonial assemblage, Nigeria was erected on the pillars of attempts to resolve some contradictions in 19th century industrial capitalism in Europe. European industry was producing at its optimum level courtesy of the growth in technology. But the internal European market was not expanding to support the huge increase in productive capacities. This was because the consumers lacked the purchasing powers to acquire the abundant goods and services made possible by capitalism's ability to release, more than ever before, the productive capacities of man (Nabudere: 1977). These contradictions led the European powers to scramble for colonies (Rodney: 1972). European explorers, missionaries and traders, since at least the 15th century, had paved the way for formal colonialism which was to start the process of integrating Africa in general into the world capitalist system. Hence new states like Nigeria emerged as a conglomeration of nations; the sole purpose of such grouping by capitalist powers was the promotion of free trade. It was important to bring together smaller societies into a conglomeration of single states so as to create larger markets that could be relatively easily managed, and to ward off competition from the other European powers who were also scrambling for colonies.

So the motive force behind the establishment of Nigeria, as the first colonial Governor General of Nigeria, Lugard (1923) confirmed was, economic necessity. Nigeria, like other colonies, was to serve as a source for raw materials to meet the needs of the industrialised nations of Europe, and a market for the finished (material, cultural, and other) goods from those industries (Williams: 1980, Shenton: 1986). Lugard stressed this when he stated that the colonies were acquired on behalf of

"the congested populations of Europe whose lives and industries depend on a share of the bounties with which nature has so abundantly endowed the tropics" (1923: 58).

Accordingly European interest in possessing colonies "remained basically economic" (ibid). Britain unilaterally declared the Nigerian areas of trading influence as its "protectorates" in order

"to safeguard the future of trade and to exclude potential French and German competition from an area where British merchants had for many years enjoyed dominance." (Hirshfield: 1979: 18)

Thus "the underlying motive of colonialism was to ensure the effective exploitation of the colony to the benefit of the British finance and industry ..." (Graf: 1988: 7). This servicing of European capitalist states therefore provided one crucial ideological pillar on which Nigeria was erected. But its relevance to education can best be appreciated by looking at the development of the capitalist values and agenda in Nigeria.

#### i Development of Capitalist Values in Nigeria

African 'social formations' (societies, polities, cultures and economies) were transformed and integrated into the world capitalist system through a number of gradual but effective processes. The integration is a continuing one (Gutkind and Waterman: 1977). The processes included changes in the consumption patterns of the colonised peoples, so that the higher quality European finished goods registered an edge over locally-produced goods. This led to *de-industrialisation*, i.e., the destruction of the local industries, because they could not withstand competition with technology-intensive European industries, and international capital. The monetization of the economy, a situation in which money is used as the sole instrument of exchange and economic transactions, meant that the pre-capitalist motive behind production had to change as well. Production was no more for subsistence but for profit and generation of surplus-value.

‘Urbanisation’ was another important process in the absorption of Africa into the world capitalist system. A distinction emerged between the urban and rural areas. The urban areas were, for logistic and economic reasons constituted into commercial, administrative and political centres, while the rural economy remained the producer of basic agricultural raw materials, cash crops that were processed for export in the few factories in the cities (Hopkins: 1973). These changes involved the gradual creation of an urban poor, the reserve army of cheap labour; they also were the occasion of problems of migration. Thus de-peasantization and proletarianisation, or the transformation of the peasantry and rural dwellers into labourers and wage earners especially in the cities, promoted a struggle between people as members of distinctive socio-economic classes. At the same time, the local power elites and prominent merchants were being transformed into an embryo *bourgeoisie*.

## ii Social Classes and the State

The embryo bourgeoisie had a limited capacity to raise its own capital independently of the multi-national corporations for which they served as middle men in a colonial state. The nation-state therefore assumed a very powerful role because it controlled the colony’s resources. Through ‘marketing and produce boards’ for example, the state became, for the petit bourgeoisie, the main source of capital generation (Shenton: op cit). This role of the state became even more crucial in Nigeria, with the discovery of oil in 1958, two years before independence. Governing involves the exercising of control over the allocation of scarce resources among the competing social and economic collectives. The development of such control provides the essential background to understanding the various crises in the politics, economy and society of both the colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. For example the Biafran war can be seen as an outcome of

the attempt to control the machinery of state and the allocation of some scarce resources.

### iii The State and the Developing Capitalist Agenda

The capitalist ideology continues to occupy a primary place in the state, society and economy of Nigeria (Beckman: 1982, 1985, 1987). So government policies, programmes and processes, are mainly projections of the need to 'modernise', or 'develop', both understood as synonyms for capitalist growth. The attendant liberal agenda of the capitalist ideology is expressed in the major legal and political documents and policy papers of the Nigerian state. For example, 'egalitarianism' is a value prescribed for the Nigerian society, in the National Policy on Education (1981) as well as the 1989 constitution. Equally prominent in the Nigerian constitution is the commitment to a 'democratic society' and 'a land of full and equal opportunity'. The social relationships among people in contemporary Nigeria, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds, are largely defined within this dominant ideological framework.

The present regime's agenda for Nigeria, appears to be no less than the completion of the process of integration into the world capitalist system, - a process which started over 500 years ago. Its 'Structural Adjustment Programme' is the most open capitalist agenda for Nigeria ever. That programme contains some monetarist policies such as the privatization and commercialization of most public services, devaluation of the national currency (the Naira), liberalisation of trade, and so on. The commitment to the capitalist agenda coupled with the transformation of the economy and society along such lines, ensures that capitalist ideology, informs many policy matters and considerations. These include education: the distribution of educational benefits (schooling facilities, scholarships, etc) and the production of knowledge to support and promote the capitalist ideology.



As Nigeria is a non-industrial, but developing, capitalist state, the rural economy i.e. agriculture, still predominates economic activities for most Nigerians. Even though capitalist, large-scale mechanised farming is being introduced with vigour, the peasantry as a class survives as a significant force in politics, economy, and society of Nigeria (Filson: 1991). There are, relative to the agrarian sector and the peasantry, even fewer industries and industrial workers. The state is the largest employer of labour. So the class structure is not just an African equivalent of that which obtains in the advanced capitalist settings. The structure, coupled with the inter-play of the complex cultural forces in the state and civil society, makes Nigerian capitalism of a different order to that of western Europe and North American capitalism. This means that it allows for an inter-play with other ideological forces - those of the primordial structures - within the context of Nigerian society.

These dual ideological foundations of the country render Nigeria complex and the analysis of social phenomena, in that context, complicated. It is now important to examine briefly some basic aspects of the primordial structure, i.e. the structure of loyalties and identities of significance to traditions rather than that form of identities occasioned by developing capitalism. Due regard must therefore be given to these in analysing the processes of designing educational knowledge in Nigeria.

## **2 THE MAIN CULTURAL FORCES IN NIGERIA**

Three cultural or primordial forces stand out among the contending ideological forces in Nigeria. These are: ethnicity, religion, and political identity (for example, the forces of regionalism and statism). Each of these constitutes a focus of division and identity in the body politic of Nigeria.

As a result of the early contacts with the west, most of the people in the coastal areas were Christians, and more westernised than those in the hinterland. Nduka (1977) and Taiwo (1980) for example, have shown that there were many Portuguese schools in the coastal areas teaching the Christian scriptures and some western cultural practices by the 15th century. Proximity to the sea and logistic factors such as the ability to communicate in English and read and write in the roman style, encouraged more trade and commerce with the west than was the case in the north. In the north on the other hand, with the exception of the non-Muslim middle-belt, earlier contacts with Arabs fostered the spread of Islamic literacy, and a system of administration patterned along Arabian and Islamic lines. So while the south was more economically advanced and more educated, in the western sense, the north has consistently enjoyed greater political advantages because of its political history and population.

The north accounts for about two-thirds of the land mass of Nigeria, and more than 60 per cent of Nigerians live there; numerically it became dominant. Educationally, the north resisted western education, which its Muslim peoples equated with the Christian crusade. So, on educational grounds, the north lagged behind the south. Economically, the north had a less developed economy (understood in western, capitalistic, terms) than that which obtained in the south.

Owing to the colonial pattern of administration which allowed such divisions, each of the regions was dominated by one of the three main ethnic groups and the primordial forces exhibited themselves in a peculiar way. Islam, which is in many of its aspects contrary to and in conflict with western civilization, is much the most significant cultural force in northern Nigeria. Christianity and westernization on the other hand, are more significant in the south. However, the vast majority of the northern minority ethnic groups are Christians and more western in outlook than the average (Muslim) northerner. This is partly due to

more Christian missionary activities (especially education) in the lower north, where a number of these minority groups are mainly found.

## 2.1 RELIGION

Religion, as a highly significant ideological expression is very strong amongst the Nigerian peoples. The majority of Nigerians take religion very seriously indeed. There are however, different sects and sub-divisions within the two main religions followed by Nigerians, - Islam and Christianity. There are philosophical contradictions and contraries between the two. In Islam, for example, there is no distinction between the state and religion. The exact opposite holds true for Christianity, according to which, people should 'give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and give to God that which is God's'. Such a precept would be unintelligible in Islam. This accounts for tensions among Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. The latter insist on a secular state, which the former consider a dogma of Christianity (Yahya: 1980), and a denial of their basic religious identity. For the Muslims, sovereignty belongs to Allah (God), and all laws must descend directly from Him. Allegiance to any law which contradicts this basic political and legal claim is to be refused. In the Nigerian case, that means rule by Shari'a (Islamic law). All political authority is derived from Islamic law. It also means pan-Nigerian identity outside the Islamic faith is a secondary issue, so that, one is first, a Muslim, then a Nigerian. This fundamental commitment cuts the grounds from under the principles of secularism, which the liberal Nigerians particularly seek to promote. The religious tension therefore, implies that, either the rights and responsibilities of each religious group are respected or at the least appreciated, or they are not. In the former case, there is a contradiction, in the sense that the secular state, by granting such rights independently of the political structure, is in a contradictory position. This is so because separate primary identities apart from pan-Nigerian identity are sanctioned.

Consequently, attempts have been made over the years to make certain compromises. These include the right to an appropriate religious curriculum for followers of each religion, and the right of Muslims (and by extension Christians) to set up their own religious schools. The Muslim state system resolves this problem by allowing for religious differences, so long as the Muslims' right to discharge their religious responsibilities are granted. Hence the deliberate attempts by the Nigerian state to take this volatile situation into active consideration in policy and decision making at all levels, and in all sectors of the society. Precisely how far such attempts go in resolving the social contradiction is an open question, but of relevance to the fetishism of educational knowledge.

This complexity is compounded by the predominance of the two main religions in the two respective geographical divides; Islam in the north, and Christianity in the south. The western states of the Yorubas, are neatly divided between the two main belief systems. The religious issue is further complicated by its connection with the ethnic factor. The Hausa-Fulani in the north, are overwhelmingly Muslim, and Islam is central to their cultural, political and other practices. The Ibos and other ethnic groups in the south east as well as the mid-west are overwhelmingly Christians, though there are a few Muslims among the people of the mid-west. Similarly a majority of the ethnic groups in the lower northern Nigeria are Christians, but there is a significant number of practitioners of traditional religions. All these religious groupings and their interrelationships are of significance in the production of educational knowledge in Nigeria.

## 2.2 ETHNICITY

There are in Nigeria more than 250 ethnic groups which are further defined by their language and culture. These ethnic differences make space for conflicts between members of the diverse ethnic groups within Nigerian society, politics, economy and education. The ethnic factor is further complicated by the

dominance of the three main ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Ibo and Yoruba). These three ethnic groups enjoy relative predominance in the north, east and west respectively. The Hausa language enjoys relative advantages because it is international, in the sense that it has been, for centuries, a market language especially in the west African sub-region. So it is spoken either as a first or second language, or at least used for transactions by most people, in a number of the ethnic communities in northern Nigeria and beyond. This linguistic and cultural advantage puts Hausa in sharp contrast to the other two main languages - Yoruba and Ibo. But Yoruba like Hausa is spoken in some west African countries although not in such extended geographical area as the Hausa. So the Ibo language does not enjoy similar advantages.

There is distrust rooted in ethnic differences, between the members of these three main groups. Each fears cultural and political domination by the others, a point which accounts for the federal arrangement in place in Nigeria; so that, each enjoys within its own geographical limits, some form of relative autonomy. Such complex relationships between the groups are strengthened by historical accidents. The Hausa/Fulani, and the muslim population of the north, tend to take pride in their earlier contact with the Arabs and Islamic civilization as a result of which they acquired some form of literacy and its accruing advantages, prior to colonialism. The ethnic groups in the south, particularly those in the south east tend to take pride in their earlier contacts with western civilization, a factor which gives them a competitive edge in modern society i.e. developing trade and commerce over the people of the north.

In general the southern ethnic groups had educational advantages over those of the north, particularly the Hausa-Fulani. In addition the Yorubas, have had the 'advantage' of having the seat of government and colonial commerce; Lagos, in their domains. The ethnic mistrust, was accentuated by the McPherson

Constitution of 1951 that introduced effective but divisive federalism, and made the regions the centres of power and control and allocation of state resources. The consequence was that, the northern people, particularly the Hausa-Fulani and their allies (Nupe, Kanuri, and so on) opposed the southerners' having any influence on their government and economy. A similar case obtained in other regions i.e. a measure of political and economic emasculation of peoples who 'belonged' elsewhere. One reason for this was that northern peoples came to fear the aggressive and enterprising, as well as 'educated', southerners particularly the Ibos and the Yorubas. They mistrusted the Yorubas whom, it was argued, had enjoyed commercial, financial and other advantages accruing from their nearness to the federal power base, since the colonial days. Similar mistrusts were to be found between the Yorubas and the Ibos.

The creation of a mid-west region encouraged the development of a minority factor: members of the minority groups strived to counter the domination of the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba in the Nigerian society and economy. Northern minorities found ready allies in the southern minorities. But the instrument of state creation, which tends to diversify power bases, led to the emergence of an additional pattern of division and identity. In sum: ethnic and political divisions have similar ideological forces.

## 2.3 POLITICAL INDENTITY

### i Protectorates, Regions and Provinces

The political structures of Nigeria evolved over time through political decisions made on the basis of considerations given to the diverse cultural forces discussed above. Protectorates or areas, carved out by the British as their spheres of trading influence to be protected against the incursions of Germans, French and other European competitors, were the first political structures established in

Nigeria prior to formal colonialism. The protectorate system marked a transition to formal colonialism.

The Lagos Protectorate was the first to be set up. Then the whole of southern Nigeria was declared a Protectorate in 1903. Consequently northern Nigeria became the third Protectorate. The three were, from the beginning, administered simultaneously but in different political fashion on the basis of their religious and ethnic peculiarities. The Lagos Protectorate was later fused into the southern Protectorate. The Sokoto Caliphate, its Bornu counterpart as well as the numerous communities in the middle belt were incorporated and administered by the British as the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The protectorate system contributed to future ideological struggles between the diverse peoples of Nigeria.

The two protectorates of the north and the south were formally merged, as the colony of Nigeria, in 1914. Their names were changed to 'regions'. The regions were, in line with the recognition of diversities throughout the country, made up of *Provinces*: administrative sub-units, patterned in most cases along the lines of the pre-colonial administrative structures or closely-common historical and cultural ties. Each of the regions comprised a number of provinces which provided structures for local government, and 'indirect-rule' through the local chiefs and traditional political institutions; especially was this the case in the north and the west. Each region was administered differently in order to allow for its peculiarities. A federal structure of government was formally established by the McPherson Constitution of 1951. It created three regions: north, east and west. The southern region was split into the 'eastern' and the western regions.

So the geopolitics of Nigeria, reflected the three dominant ethnic groups and cultures of the peoples of the respective regions, i.e., the Hausa-Fulani

dominated the northern region, together with the Kanuris of the defunct Bornu empire, because of their Islamic solidarity. Other minority ethnic groups and communities, owing to, among other factors, numerical disadvantage, took a northern identity. This movement was strengthened by the fact that Hausa language was widely spoken as a language of commerce. The Hausa language and culture became, for these scattered groups, the focus of the northern identity. Middle belt consciousness was to develop much later. The western region comprised the Yoruba and Benin Kingdoms. A 'mid-west' region, the former Benin kingdom, was carved out of the region in 1963. The eastern region was made up of the Igbos and the other relatively minority groups of the south east. The creation of the mid-west region in 1963 brought an additional dimension to the struggle between the primordial ideological forces in Nigeria: the minorities factor.

#### ii States and National Autonomy

The federal agenda, including the creation of more states, became even more relevant to every aspect of Nigerian life as a result of the Nigerian civil war (1967 - 70). The discovery of oil in the minority areas of the mid-west and eastern Nigeria, and the politics of power sharing between the central and regional governments, were some of the factors that led to the secession of eastern Nigeria, which in 1967 declared itself as the *Republic of Biafra*. The Ibos were the dominant group in Biafra. The federal government then abolished the four regions and replaced them with new structures of power and administration, called '*States*' following the American arrangement. Twelve states were created out of the defunct regions: three from the east, with the Igbos having only one, and the minorities two. The Mid-west became a state instead of a region, and the west was divided into two states, while six states were created from the northern region. The civil war led to further agitation for autonomy by more groups and combinations of groups, in order to obtain greater share of the national



resources. The politics of struggle for autonomy within a united federation of Nigeria, was further stimulated by the politics of federal revenue generation and the arguments of particular groups that they have been marginalised from power at the centre or that they suffer from relative regional, educational, and other forms of disadvantages. Some states, especially those in which oil is produced, felt that they deserved more of the national resources than other states. Others felt they were educationally under-resourced and, given their high population, needed more revenue in order to bridge educational and other developmental gaps. So it came to be believed that more states were needed. Hence seven more states were carved out of the twelve in 1976. Other state creation exercises followed in 1987 when two more states were created, and in 1991 when nine more states were formed to make a total of thirty states.

The states were meant to replace the regions as the focii of power-sharing and sub-national autonomy. Even though most of the 30 states are either dominated by, or overwhelmingly made up of, a single ethnic group, they were not created on the basis of ethnic or religious identity. A relatively new political phenomena is emerging, especially with the recent state creation exercise viz: statism whereby people identify themselves with their state, as the focus of solidarity.

#### 2.4 RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CULTURAL GROUPS

Nigeria emerged as a single political unit as the outcome of an attempt by British colonialists to reconcile the volatile ideological differences and fuse them into a single state and society. These differences, nonetheless, play a significant role in the educational system, particularly the production of educational knowledge.

In the discussion of the relationships between the cultural groups in Nigeria, it is sometimes said that these are essentially antagonistic to each other. I shall argue that this view cannot be sustained and that its significance is heavily exaggerated

when such supposedly antagonistic relationships are made to appear primary. But the appearance or presentation of those cultural relationships as fundamental aspects of social antagonisms among Nigerians tends to cover up the real focus of social conflicts. Fetishism is both explained and expressed by the presentation of social antagonism, primarily in terms of primordial sentiments, in public, including educational, policies.

It should be emphasised here that, despite the different cultural groupings in Nigeria, Nigerian peoples and societies were and are not simply strange bed fellows who were brought together in a marriage of convenience by the British colonialists. They had, for centuries, contacts among themselves at the commercial, cultural and political levels. For example, the Hausa state of Kano had assimilated the non-Hausa communities and co-existed in harmony and prosperity with them (Naniya: 1987). Hence one finds, within Kano, Yoruba, Nupe, Kanuri, numerous communities variously assimilated into the dominant Hausa-Fulani society. The Hausa traders were also settled in what they termed the prosperous *Kurmi* or the coastal regions. They traded in kola-nuts and a host of other articles (Usman: 1979). Crowther (1970) had also indicated that, by the middle of the 19th century, Hausa language was the second language in the Yoruba Kingdoms.

The history of Nigeria is not only one of ethnic and cultural antagonisms. Relationships between them have not traditionally been those of conflict. There were differences and tensions between the cultures, and these remain, but cultural differences are only (politically and educationally) relevant as a result of the new system of governance: that of the single state and society. In particular, the relationship between the state and the ethnic groups assumes a special form in Nigeria only because of its role in fostering unity and identity on the one hand, and exclusion on the other, in the struggle for the accumulation of material and

other advantages. So in so far as there are cultural variations in Nigeria, these are in themselves, and taken independently, of little significance. They are important mainly by reference to the attempts made by individual states and power groups to gain advantages from the overarching, national state. The relationships between the various cultural groups thus take on a conflicting dimension mainly because of the role which such conflicts, in the primordial structures, play in the attempt to gain advantages from the common state. It is in this respect that the relationship between the cultural groups become antagonistic; such antagonism covers up a more fundamental social conflict, namely that of antagonism between Nigerians as members of social classes irrespective of their religious, ethnic, state or regional backgrounds. So understood, the struggle between the various sections of contemporary Nigerian society within the common state, generates contradictions and conflicts between the varied elements of the primordial structure. The content and distribution of education play a prominent part in such conflicts.

### **3 BASIC IDEOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS IN NIGERIA**

The idea of ideology in the context of a developing capitalist and culturally plural society, yields conflicts and contradictions of different types. As I argued earlier, the relationship between the cultural groups and ideological varieties, are not *essentially* characterised by such conflicts. The relationships become contradictory and conflicting through the struggle to obtain common benefits from the common state. I here use 'contradiction' in the sense of a conflicting relationship between two or more opposing groups. (There are notorious problems to the Marxist theory of contradiction when it is transferred from the realm of logic to that of politics and history; I shall not examine these here). My interest in the idea of contradiction is strictly speaking that of contrariety; it is located within the framework of social theory rather than logic. So I am not concerned with the 'p/not p' relationship, but rather with the relationship

between 'p and q' when both 'p' and 'q' can be true, i.e. some groups prefer or want 'X' - some groups do not prefer, want, 'X' (they want or prefer 'Y' instead). These groups are in conflict but they do not literally (or logically) contradict each other. Of particular importance in this case are inconsistent forms of identity among Nigerians on the basis of which specific ideological leanings they then come to have beliefs concerning what will best promote their 'perceived interests' at given times. It is in this respect that certain areas of contradiction in the relationships between Nigerian peoples with regard to public policy may be identified as follows.

Firstly there is a contradiction between the pan-Nigerian identity and different cultural or primordial identities. The pan-Nigerian identity gives primacy to Nigeria, rather than any cultural group. But the primordial identities place primacy on ethnic, regional, and/or religious identities. For example, the northern, eastern and western regional identities can and do come into sharp conflict with the pan-Nigerian national identity, as do those of the Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba and other ethnically-based forms of identity. The contradiction comes into play when the ethnic, regional or religious identities take priority over the Nigerian national identity. In the struggle to gain one benefit or the other from the federal, state or local governments, Nigerians are made to give priority to their cultural group identities, i.e. as Tivs, Muslims, northerners, and so on. Yet they are also primarily Nigerians when they are made to believe that such an identity best promotes their interests. Thus in the struggle for a share of federally-generated revenue, contracts and public appointments, Nigerians are made to believe that, they are first and foremost, citizens of their respective states, or they are northerners, or they are Muslims or Christians, or they are Yorubas or Kanuris. But in times of national crises, such as in the civil war or in times of economic crises, they are mobilised solely as Nigerians, who must make sacrifices in order to save the country.

Secondly there is a contradiction between ethnic identity on the one hand, and regional identity on the other hand. Some ethnic groups are spread out in a number of adjoining states, and so some states contain a number of distinct ethnic groups within them. For example, the Yorubas are scattered in a number of states (Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Kwara), as are the Hausa (Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Sokoto, Bauchi, Kaduna, etc), and the Igbos (Enugu, Abia, Anambra, Imo). States like Edo, Plateau, Taraba, Niger, are made up of numerous ethnic minority groups. In both cases, the question of inconsistent identities arise. There are, for instance, contradictory identities for the Yoruba or the Hausa or Ibo who are scattered in different states. As citizens of their respective administrative units, their focus of identity is political, i.e. they are citizens of Oyo or Ondo States. But as members of an ethnic group their political status becomes irrelevant; they see themselves as Hausas or Ibos or Yorubas across the board. Within the multi-ethnic states (as in Kaduna), they may be made to believe that their interests are best served by presenting themselves as Hausa or Kaje. But they are Kaduna state citizens as far as their relationships with other Nigerians are concerned.

There is thirdly, a contradiction between religious and all other forms of identities. For Islam in particular, Islamic *Ikhwanīya* (brotherhood and solidarity) have absolute precedence over national, ethnic, regional or state identity. Fourthly, contradictions exist between religions: Islam as against Christianity, and the two versus Paganism. Related to these are contradictions within the distinctive religious groups, i.e. contradictions between sects and persuasions within the same religion. For example, the Muslim *Sunni* and *Shi'a*. Some exist within sects such as *The Qadiriyya order* as opposed to the *Tijjaniyya* (Anwar: 1988). For Christianity in Nigeria, there are contradictions between

*Catholicism* and *Anglicanism*, and both on the one hand, and the Africanised church, for example the *Aladura*, on the other.

Fifthly contradictions pertain between all the primordial (cultural) ideological forces on the one hand, and social class identity on the other. I have claimed that ideological orientation of the Nigerian state is that of emergent capitalism. In this case we have a contradiction between, on the one hand, the state's and economy's form of identity, and on the other hand primordialism in the civil society. Developing capitalism, as I have argued earlier (see section 1.2: 252 - 7), transforms the traditional society into a class society. New social classes appropriate to capitalism have emerged and are taking shape. While capitalist society is based on social classes, traditional society rests on a primordialism that is not, in this sense, class-based. One implication of this situation is that developing capitalism is dominant over the traditional society, which is consequently decaying. So appeals are made, from time to time to both forms of identities. In times of intra-class squabbles, conflicts over accumulation of private property, the ruling class, as in scenario one above (i.e. the contradiction between pan-Nigerian identity and primordialism), resorts to the appeal to ethnic, regional or religious identities, in order to heighten the recognition of existing disadvantages so that they acquire more advantages over others engaged in the competition.

Of all the contradictions, this latter one is that which most clearly requires an explanation in terms of the fetishism of educational knowledge. Here, the state policies, including the production of educational knowledge, are to be understood in terms of all the other contradictions, between the state and the economy on one hand, and the state and civil society on the other. Educational objectives which in the first place dictate the designing and selection of educational knowledge, appear subsequently to be grounded in an attempt to

address the various crises, conflicts and inconsistencies in identities among Nigerians. But upon careful assessment, the fundamental national and educational objectives which inform educational knowledge promote for the most part the dominant developing capitalist society and its tacit liberal democratic agenda. Thus a distinction is found in educational knowledge between its appearance and its essence. The fetishism of educational knowledge entailed in these contradictions will be examined by reference to the production of knowledge in Nigeria.

## **4 PRODUCTION OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN NIGERIA**

### **4.1 FEDERALISM AND EDUCATIONAL PROVISIONS**

Military regimes are the central feature of Nigeria's post-independence political history. Nigerian federalism runs a three-tier system of government: a strong federal government at the centre, the states as sub-autonomous political and administrative units, and local government councils within each state. The federal government operates an 'exclusive legislative list'. It is empowered by the Constitution to run economic and monetary policy, defence, foreign policy, to have control of mineral and other resources, revenue allocation, etc. The states have a separate legislative list, as do the local councils. But there is a 'concurrent legislative list' which includes matters such as education, in which both the federal and state governments partake.

The federal government runs, for the whole country, a national policy on education, which was designed and adopted in 1977 and improved in 1981 and 1985. The federal government, acting on behalf of the whole federation, co-ordinates the implementation of educational policy. It does this mainly through the federal ministry of education and its parastatal bodies. It is charged with the business of selecting the knowledge deemed appropriate to the declared national

and educational objectives and principles particularly at the secondary school levels.

In so planning and acting, as I shall show later, it permits an input from the diverse cultural backgrounds of the peoples in the thirty states. The states are allowed, in the process, areas of choice in which to take account of their specific peculiarities, whilst yet working collectively for 'unity in diversity', economic, scientific, and technological development, ideals of social justice and egalitarianism, and so on. The specific national ideals and the educational objectives, are predicated on certain fundamental ideological assumptions: the promotion of a liberal democratic order entailed by the need for economic development within the context of a free-market philosophy and the recognition of the diverse cultural backgrounds of the Nigerian peoples. These provide the twin ideological forces that prominently feature in the production, and distribution of educational knowledge in Nigeria. They provide the basic criteria for looking at the ideology of educational knowledge in Nigeria. They also give some indications of an emerging fetishism of educational knowledge.

#### 4.2 THE PROCEDURES

The Federal Cabinet in Nigeria, on the basis of its commitment to certain fundamental ideals, identifies the specific objectives it intends to be achieved through the educational system. The Federal Ministry of Education then deconstructs those objectives into specific educational goals and broad educational programmes, while the *Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council* (NERDC) is delegated, on the basis of the guide-lines provided by government, to work out the specific items of knowledge or, more broadly, areas of knowledge appropriate to the designed programmes and their objectives.



The Federal Ministry of Education is an organ of central government; all states have their own ministries of education. The ministries of education are responsible for the management and administration of the educational system. The administration of all levels and all aspects of the educational system, involves determining what is to be taught at all levels of the Nigerian school system with the exception of the universities. The Federal Ministry of Education has the major responsibility for co-ordinating the overall implementation of the educational policy throughout the country. The ministry has a number of units and specialised bodies to which it delegates some of its powers of management, of the implementation of educational programmes. For all intents and purposes the ministry is the official educational wing of the government of Nigeria. Matters such as curriculum development are conducted, on the authority of the government of Nigeria, by the ministry and or its specialised parastatal bodies, such as the NERDC.

I interviewed, in the summer of 1990, some officials of the Federal Ministry of Education, of selected states, and some officials of the NERDC (the body that is officially empowered to carry out the task of curriculum development) who are directly involved in the process of educational knowledge production. Subsequent quotations are taken from these interviews. Those officials included Mr. Okoro (Federal Ministry of Education), Evangelist Fadeyi and Dr. Adeniyi, (NERDC), A. Idris (Kano State Ministry of Education), and Mrs. Bello (West African Examinations Council). The selection of educational knowledge and the determination of curricula (syllabii) involve a number of processes.

The Nigerian state, represented by either the federal cabinet, (in civilian regimes), or the ruling military council (in military regimes), usually determines the specific programmes and the respective objectives it wants to see achieved. "These are then passed to the Federal Ministry of Education, to be broken down

into achievable educational programmes" (Okoro: 1990). An education body, the *National Council on Education* (N. C. E.) is the highest educational decision-making organ in Nigeria. It is empowered to examine, and take decisions on, any aspect of the educational system that is subject to legislation. The council comprises all political heads of the education ministries of the federation, at both the federal and state levels. It also includes representatives from faculties of education of Nigerian universities, research institutes, and other bodies. It deliberates on the proposed programme(s) as submitted by the federal or state governments, or by any of their advisory sub-committees.

A sub-committee of the NCE, the *Joint Consultative Committee on Education*, (JCC) is then asked to deliberate, at a professional level, on the implications, requirements and other necessary factors pertaining to the proposed programme. The JCC is made up of the federal Director of Education, and his counterparts in all the States of the federation. These are the professional heads of their respective ministries of education. One of the functions of the JCC is curriculum development. The JCC has to ensure that there is uniformity of standards in the preparation of standardised and quality curricula for all levels of education before that of the universities. Uniformity of curriculum provision entails that the offerings in each subject of study should not be radically different throughout the states, although some minimum choices, on the basis of special factors in each state, are allowed. This means that Social Studies, History and Religious Studies (Islamic or Christian) should be basically the same throughout Nigeria, provided that a particular section of the course offering is earmarked to cater for the cultural and other ideological features in the respective states. The JCC employs its relevant *Reference Committees* when critically assessing all the possible options before it. It then makes its own recommendations to the NCE.

The NCE takes stock of the JCC's proposals and subsequently amends, improves, alters or rejects them as the case may be. NCE's decisions are submitted to the relevant curriculum bodies of the Federal Ministry of Education including the NERDC. The council has a number of sub-units for example, the *Comparative Education Study and Adaptation centre* (CESAC), the *Book Development Centre* (BDC) and so on. After the NERDC board has deliberated on the submission from the NCE, the particular requirements in terms of the specific educational input that is required to meet the programme's overall objectives, are then constructed (Adeniyi: 1990).

The *Book Development Centre*, or any unit charged with a particular responsibility, then assembles, a number of experts and subject specialists to constitute a panel, that will, on the basis of the guidelines worked out at the successive stages, draw up appropriate items for inclusion into the new programme (interview, with Father Fadeyi: 1990). These experts and subject specialists include representatives from each of the states in the federation, usually a Director of Education or his representative (interview with Idris: 1990). The rationale of this procedure is to ensure uniformity in the provision of educational knowledge throughout the federation, as well as to allow for input from the various cultural diversities within the country. The experts also include academics and experienced secondary school subject teachers (interview with Abba a subject teacher at Federal Government Girls College, Bauchi: 1990), and representatives of subject associations. So, for example, when drawing up an educational programme on the national economy, the 'Economic Society of Nigeria' was invited to participate. In the development of political programmes, the 'Political Science Association of Nigeria' is invited. The examination boards, who ultimately will test pupils in the programme and award them certificates accordingly, also participate at this stage.

The panel meets under the auspices of the NERDC in order to draft the bodies of knowledge appropriate to the given objectives, and the operational guidelines for teaching and assessment (Evangelist Fadeyi: 1990). The draft programme is then examined by a different panel of specialists, and representatives of the state governments, religious groups, and different interest organisations such as the labour movement, chambers of commerce and industry, and so on, as the programme may warrant. Only those organisations which are deemed to have an interest, whether direct or indirect, in the proposed programme are given the opportunity to participate in the process. These meet in a conference organised by the NERDC. The conference critiques the draft and make suggestions for improvements. It is basically a professional and advisory conference. Provisions are always made for each state of the federation, to provide as far as possible for their respective singularities. There is much emphasis on local cultural, religious, political and other ideological features in the final draft (Idris: 1990).

The conference's recommendations are synthesised by the Book Development Centre of the NERDC, and then the draft programme is submitted to the Federal Ministry of Education, which in turn tables it before the NCE. The draft syllabus will, at a later stage, be tabled before the main JCC through the appropriate reference committee, before the NCE is advised on whether to adopt or reject it as the national syllabus for Nigeria. As an authoritative political body the NCE takes decisions on the draft programme, and then submits it, through the Minister of Education, to the Federal Executive Council, i.e. the federal cabinet, which approves or rejects it. Whatever the federal cabinet approves becomes the official curriculum (i.e. educational knowledge) and hence the official view of knowledge sanctioned for transmission in the schools throughout the federation of Nigeria.

Appropriate textbooks and relevant teaching materials are then either commissioned, designed or recommended by the BDC. In terms of the implementation of the programmes, a considerable emphasis is placed upon local peculiarities. The JCC monitors the implementation of the official programme.

Examination bodies such as the *West African Examinations Council* (WAEC) then use the approved syllabii to draw up the examination syllabus (interview with Mrs. Bello: 1990). However the examination syllabus, in most cases, especially at the senior secondary school level, is given priority by the education authorities, the teachers, the parents and the pupils. "It often determines the actual teaching and learning especially at the senior secondary school level" (Abba: 1990). Preparations for the public examinations, take priority over every other aspect of the teaching of the curriculum. However, in most cases, there is little distinction between the two syllabii, except perhaps for different points of emphasis. Certain issues which relate to the fetishism of educational knowledge in Nigeria may be raised by reference to some concrete examples of the issues I have described above, so I now turn to the question of the senses in, and the extent to which, educational knowledge in Nigeria is fetish.

#### 4.3 BACKGROUND IDEALS IN THE PRODUCTION OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN NIGERIA

The production of educational knowledge in Nigeria is a federal responsibility, although the states are involved in many of its stages. The dual ideological orientations, and particularly the contradictions within these (see this chapter section 3: 205 - 9), presuppose that all sectors of the state, the economy, and civil society are catered for in designing the fundamental objectives of the state, which in turn define the general and educational goals to be pursued in schools. The

officially-defined goals are supposed to be invested in, and recovered from the educational knowledge.

The federal government of Nigeria, operates with certain social, political, and economic objectives. These are referred to as 'the fundamental and directive principles of state policy', and are contained in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979, as amended in 1989). The constitution is the supreme law of the land from which governments, federal, state and local draw their powers, and authority on behalf of the Nigerian people. So those fundamental objectives are supposed to embody the general good of all the Nigerian people irrespective of their social, political, economic or other positions.

The fundamental objectives, were adopted from the second National Development Plan 1970-1974. Of interest to the ideological question is that this was a plan based on the experiences of the then just-concluded 'civil war', won by the federal side in the crisis. The fundamental national objectives to be attained through education, are stated in the National Policy on Education, (1981), as follows:

"(1) a free and democratic society; (2) a just and egalitarian society; (3) a united, strong and self-reliant nation; (4) a great and dynamic economy; (5) a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens" (section 1.1: 7).

The general philosophy of the Nigerian education system flows from these directive principles of state policy. They serve as the foundation for the 'National Policy on Education (1981)'. They are the background ideals for the definition, selection and dissemination of educational knowledge in Nigeria.

The National Policy on Education then states that, "in consequence, the quality of instruction at all levels has to be oriented towards inculcating certain values" (1981: 1.3: 7). But specifically the policy provides that,

"The national educational aims and objectives to which the philosophy is linked are therefore: (1) the inculcation of national consciousness; (2) the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the *individual and the Nigerian society* (my emphasis); (3) the training of the mind in understanding of the world around; and (4) the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipments for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society" (1.5: 8)

## **5 THE FETISHISM OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN NIGERIA**

### **5.1 GENERAL CONDITIONS**

I argued in chapters 8 and 9 of this study that the fetishism of educational knowledge is to be assessed in the light of three basic conditions: One, that "educational knowledge is in two respects - the generative and the dissemination senses - an object which is similar to a commodity". I elaborated how this condition is met (7: 129 - 37). The satisfaction of this condition has universal application, i.e. it does not require any detailed account about what makes the claim valid or otherwise in regards to Nigerian education and society. This is so because, as I argued earlier, social conditions and social relationships are fundamental and indispensable in the course of the production of educational knowledge. The nature of those social conditions will depend on the nature of the society in question. But in respect to the commodity condition of the fetishism of educational knowledge, as such these are secondary, for analytical purposes. I shall therefore not address the application of this first condition within the context of the present study. In addition to the reasons cited above, this task is indirectly accomplished through the descriptions of the social conditions that I have already provided in this chapter.

The distortion condition of the fetishism of educational knowledge, specifies that its appearance distorts its actual social essence in such a way that the former disguises the latter. I argued what this condition for the fetishism of educational knowledge implies, the means by which its validity is verified and established (8: 138 - 59). The 'alleged powers' condition for the fetishism of educational knowledge suggests that, certain powers are attributed to educational knowledge. But in reality educational knowledge either lacks these powers, or if it possesses them, they are limited, and cannot alone or independently account for the actions of those who acquired it. This claim has been assessed theoretically. The question now is the extent to which these two latter claims of the fetishism of educational knowledge hold, in Nigerian education and society.

## 5.2 ESSENCE AND APPEARANCE OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN NIGERIA

The provisions of section 1.1, 1.5 of the National Policy on Education (1981) cited earlier, provide some of the grounds for claiming that fetishism condition of educational knowledge holds in Nigeria. The ideals which inform the production of educational knowledge over-determine the proposal. They articulate some lofty demands based on the requirements of the the changes taking place in the Nigerian society. In these ideals are contained some indications as to the dominant form of society; for instance the apparent primacy of individuality over community. This primacy itself provides a reason for holding educational knowledge in Nigeria to be fetish. Assumptions are made in sections 1.5, 3 and 4 about the power of instruction and educational knowledge. The issue of national unity also appears in the section and is directly relevant to the fetish condition of educational knowledge, particularly as it relates to the dominant form of society which thrives on classes as different patterns of social stratification.



Aspects of both the traditional and modern i.e. capitalist forms of society are both appealed to in the design and selection of educational knowledge. Objectives numbers two and five, appear to be based on the premise of the Nigerian cultural plurality. But at the same time, all the five national objectives are clear articulations of the liberal capitalist agenda. The priority which the capitalist form takes over the decaying traditional forms of society, ensures that its specific expressions and requirements are dominant in the production of educational knowledge and also that, when any other set of values are projected so that they appear as the real essence of the educational knowledge, it is likely that the former goals are disguised by the latter. This gives educational knowledge a fetish quality (see 8: 138 - 46).

Educational knowledge in Nigeria disguises the central contradictions that in the first place, lead to claims about national unity and the achievement of values of tolerance. Its actual social essence is mainly in line with the dominant form of society and the interpretations of the world proposed and promoted by the ruling class, and those who act on its behalf. But these are disguised by reference to the emphasis on the national question. The plurality of values, belief systems and traditions in Nigeria suggests an absence of a single Nigerian culture. To assume there is one is to impose that one at the expense of others. The emphasis on balancing the interests of the three dominant ethnic and cultural groups in the educational system in Nigeria, promotes one form of fetishism in educational knowledge. That arrangement disguises the contradictions between the 250 groups. A false consensus is assumed.

It is to be noted that, the more the 'beautiful' ideals of the Nigerian state are invested in educational knowledge, the more its actual essence is relegated to the background. The more it is made to appear to work for the so-called 'national interests', the more it disguises the antagonistic social relations between

Nigerians as members of different social classes. This approach to knowledge production depicts the society as a unitary organism, a harmonious unity of interests collectively pursued in co-operation, thereby under-playing the conflicts between the social collectives. By so depicting society, educational knowledge, as currently taught in Nigeria, is made to fetishise the conflicting social antagonisms and interests; this knowledge in fact constitutes but a possible form of understanding. In essence what educational knowledge does is to take sides in those conflicting social relations, by promoting in its own ways, the dominant interests and interpretations of the current Nigerian socio-political establishment.

The language policy of the educational system is another aspect which tends to disguise the contradictions between language groups, by promoting some at the expense of others. This is contradictory in itself in the sense that, the policy arises out of the desire to address the problems of language as an instrument for communication in the educational system. The NPE states that,

"In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the Government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his mother tongue" (1981: 1.8: 9).

Educational knowledge in Nigeria is fetishised by its being focused around examinations. Teaching and learning in Nigeria are shackled to this basic concern. The subject matter in every subject of study is taught by the teachers, learned by the pupils, and supported by the state chiefly for the immediate goal of passing the necessary examinations. What the pupils are taught, in their schools, about Nigerian cultures, values of tolerance, and the advantages of unity and peace among the nationalities within the country, may well be mastered but are so basically for examination purposes.

Thus, the social issues and problems, as well as social and allied goals deposited in educational knowledge, are here transformed by the appearance of educational knowledge into, a relationship between two objects or processes: mastery of the educational knowledge on one hand, and examination and certification on the other. The contradictions that are of relevance to the claim that educational knowledge is fetish are so serious that, the mass failure in public examinations throughout Nigeria in 1987, led the Federal Ministry of Education to assume that, because of this, the whole educational system was breaking down. Here is disguised so much that is essential for educational knowledge. The social relations behind educational decisions, are hidden. The social essence of the whole educational endeavour is transformed into an asocial relationship between abstract knowledge and its mastery, and the passing or failing the school certificates: G. C. E, Teachers' Grade Two Certificate, City and Guilds, and so on. These transformations of the essence of educational knowledge take place, as I have argued, in the light of the assumptions about the unsubstantiated causal links between beliefs and social actions.

There are other examples of fetishism in the whole process. Crucial among these are reliance by the state and the official organs on experts, and specialists. So are the numerous claims to the powers of educational knowledge, as evidenced in the National Policy on Education, and the emphasis on realising every conceivable national objective through education, and specifically educational knowledge. There is also the problem of the connection between the two main ideological frameworks at play in Nigeria, capitalism and the primordial cultural forces. The differences between them cannot be unified through the process of a single educational programme. Either of the two will have to take a primary position and so provide the essential objectives to be met by educational knowledge. Fetishism in terms of the contradiction between the essence and the

appearance of educational knowledge and its main objectives is clearly built in to the school system and the educational knowledge it provides.

### 5.3 THE POWERS OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN NIGERIA

The National Policy on Education started off by stating that, " ... the Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted education par excellence for effecting national development" (1981: 5). This seems to attribute to education the power to effect national development, as a social goal. The NPE (1981) makes education, and so the acquisition of educational knowledge, the primary and crucial factor for national development. It states, that,

"Education will continue to be highly rated in national development plans, because education is *the most important* instrument for (social and economic) change as any fundamental change .... has to be preceded by an educational revolution" (my emphasis, 1.7.1: 9).

This is self-explanatory as far as the claims to the powers of educational knowledge in relation to social power and social action of those who acquire it are concerned.

Furthermore, and based on its convictions about the primacy and powers of educational knowledge, it deposits some specified social objectives which the Nigerian state wants to see realized through educational knowledge. The aim is that these aims and objectives will be recovered from the products of the schooling system, who will be expected to play a functional role in the society. The NPE (1981) clearly attributes such powers of attaining favoured social effects to educational knowledge. The policy makes the following judgements about secondary education:

"In specific terms, the secondary school should (among other things): (c) *equip* students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology; (d) *develop* and *project* Nigerian culture .... ; *raise* a generation of people *who can* .... *appreciate* the values

specified under our broad national aims, and live as good citizens;  
(f) foster Nigerian unity .." (my emphasis, section 4.17: 16)

The attribution of certain social powers to educational knowledge does not stop there. It envisaged that,

"the junior secondary school ... will teach all *the basic subjects which will enable pupils to* acquire further knowledge and develop skills" (19.4: 17).

Furthermore it was also provided that

"the senior secondary school ... will have a core curriculum designed to broaden pupils' knowledge and outlook. The core curriculum is the group of subjects which every pupil must take in addition to his or her specialities" (19.6: 17).

Educational knowledge in Nigeria is given the primary status of realising certain social ends. It is held by the National Policy on Education (1981) that,

"not only is education *the greatest force that can be used to bring about progress*, but it is also *the greatest investment* in that the nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources" (my emphases, section 6: 7).

A further claim to such 'magical' powers of educational knowledge is made in section 7 of the same policy document. Some of the officials, involved in educational knowledge production, that I interviewed in the summer of 1990, spoke on the relevance of this assumption. According to Evangelist Fadeyi (1990),

"there is no better way of working towards achieving some acceptable ideals among our up-coming generations, than using the instruments provided by the schooling context. We try to shape their moral attitudes, and their outlooks in the course of what is taught to them. That is why, from time to time government ask the ministry to tailor educational programmes that will promote specific national needs".

More specifically, but along the same line Okoro (1990) stated that,

"educational offerings in the schools, if correctly taught, have the capacity for disabusing the minds of the young pupils about such ills of the Nigerian society like the ideas of North and South, or religious intolerance among Muslims and Christians, or things like tribalism and the rising wave of indiscipline in the society".

It is in regards to these and similar claims to the powers of educational knowledge by governments and education policy makers, that almost all the political regimes from 1960, when Nigeria became independent, have had one programme or the other based on the Nigeria's state's definition of the fundamental ideals and principles as a guide to policy. The Tafawa Balewa (1960-1966), and the Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975) regimes, were both preoccupied with forging 'national unity' through the instruments of education. Educational programmes, in terms of stipulated subjects of study, were designed to promote this goal. The Social Studies programme at the primary and (junior) secondary school levels, was designed to equip pupils with the values of tolerance and unity in diversity. Topics that dwell on these concerns received the greatest emphasis. Textbooks were commissioned to lend support to the attainment of these ends. Towards the end of the Gowon regime, the teaching of History and Geography as separate subjects of study was abandoned in primary and secondary schools. Instead, Social Studies were heavily concentrated on the Nigerian cultures, identities, geographical features, patriotism, and allied persuasions.

All these were promoted in the hope that the minds of young pupils would be detribalised in favour of 'One Nigeria'. The jingles: "to keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done" and "go on with one Nigeria", were supplementary invocations during school assemblies and before and after lessons, especially during and after the civil war. The belief was that the Nigerianised Social Studies

programme and associated jingles these would develop the minds of the young ones in such a way as, in the long run, to produce 'new Nigerians'.

The Murtala/Obasanjo regime (1975-1979), motivated by the desire for discipline in national life, and for patriotism to counter the 'corruption' of the Gowon days, resorted to the production of appropriate educational knowledge for this task. Emphasis was placed on national symbols: the flag, the anthem and national pledge, were invested as daily rituals to be respected by the teachers and their pupils. The Shehu Shagari regime's (1971-1983), 'Ethical Revolution and National Guidance' was in the same vein. A similar trend re-emerged with Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985) regime's 'War Against Indiscipline'. The present regime of Ibrahim Babangida actually re-formed the educational unit which is charged with the task of producing curricula, syllabuses and instructional items. That was in preparation for making the demand that the knowledge that is taught in schools, promote the regime's own favoured agenda of a 'structural adjustment programme' for the economy, and its supplementary political programme of creating a new political culture in Nigeria. The regime believes that the contents of the instruction, particularly in the humanities, should reflect these concerns. It is hoped that the long term effect will be a new economic and political orientation of Nigerians, so that, all tendencies of 'extremism' (in political and economic behaviour) will cease.

All these programmes are grounded on the basic premise that the acquisition of educational knowledge will be bound to bring about the desired effects in the pupils *qua* citizens. The production of knowledge for transmission in schools was initially tailored to support the colonial state. That explained the emphasis on the three-Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic. Commercial goals were then presented as national developmental goals. The post-independence system was designed on the basis of the attainment, of some futuristic economic, political

and social goals following Lord Ashby's (1960) study on the future of education in Nigeria, as was Harbison's study on the manpower needs of Nigeria in the early 1960s. A recent study on the same topic commissioned by the 'Nigeria Institute of Social and Economic Research' and conducted by J. Akinpelu and others (including the present researcher), is expected to play the same role as Ashby's report i.e. to set socio-political goals to be attained.

Such an approach to curriculum policies invests educational knowledge with powers it does not have. It also fetishises the lived, conflicting forms of social relationships among Nigerians by presupposing a consensus in the areas of culture, economy, politics and society. It tends to disguise the contradictions which it is designed to resolve. In such a process, these contradictions continue in real life, even though they are replaced in educational institutions by an assumed unanimity. One further contradiction is that the whole arrangement arises out of the need to address and redress the same social contradictions which disappear under assumed consensus, even before it is achieved. The use of educational knowledge towards that end is, in the first place, otiose; if the consensus exists there seems little point in working towards it. On the other hand, working towards a cultural and national consensus suggests it does not exist. Fetishism becomes an item on that agenda because educational knowledge is used to disguise certain lived experiences.

The selection, design and teaching of the values of tolerance between diverse cultures in Nigeria within educational programmes, such as Social Studies and History, may be contingently necessary but not sufficient for overcoming the problems of attaining national unity. To be sufficient such teaching must be related to other essential factors in Nigerian social, political and economic life. Even so the attainment of the desired attitudes towards, and beliefs about, tolerance as outcomes of the educational encounter cannot be assured. Apart



from the theoretical constraints, already discussed, which show that the causal link must not only be assumed but be clearly established, there are some practical issues in the cultural, political and economic sphere which may counter the hold of whatever beliefs have been invested in the pupils through their exposure to educational knowledge. Community orientation in a culturally-plural Nigeria can either confirm or abuse whatever gains (the pupils have acquired) in terms of the effects of the curricular knowledge. Toleration might emerge as a result of factors outside the educational system, such as the growth of distributive justice between the competing national groupings. In this regard the political structure and the economic and social relationships between Nigerians, are some of the essential factors which, in conjunction with educational knowledge, make or mar the emergence of these values into the lived experience of Nigerians. The socio-political goal of national unity contained in the educational objectives, can only be achieved at a practical, not theoretical level. The theoretical dimension (as educational knowledge allows) is indeed crucial to providing, and articulating, some justifications for the goal. This is contingently necessary for the achievement of national unity; it is not sufficient for the internalisation of these beliefs and attitudes necessary for tolerance, and their sustained expression in behaviour.

## CONCLUSION

The theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge, as argued in this study, is a theory that seeks to explain the ideological nature of educational knowledge. What makes educational knowledge ideological, why and how it is so, need to be clearly shown. The usual justification offered for the belief that educational knowledge is ideological is to be found in a favoured interpretation of the relationship between knowledge and the social structure. But this is a relationship which, I hope to have shown, is not sufficiently clear as to disallow any other possible re-interpretation or account of the ideology of educational knowledge.

I have started from the position that all educational knowledge is ideological; the claim is to be understood and explained in terms of a social setting. The understanding of such a social setting must involve the interests of the social collectives in that setting. So all beliefs, theories, doctrines, and dogmas, are to be understood in terms other than the truth and falsity of the beliefs that make up these theories, etc. In this sense the acquisition of such knowledge has a pay off: learning or acquiring the knowledge promotes the interests of people as members of a social collective.

The theories of ideology with which I started stress the ideas of class struggles and the dialectics of history. What I sought to do is to show that educational knowledge is never to be understood or explained as innocuous. Such is a requirement of all knowledge produced and disseminated within an educational system, which serves societies that exhibit a pluralism of values and understandings of the world. Such a society is one in which there are contending classes and social groups. All seek to exercise influence in the production of educational knowledge, since its teaching in schools will serve their interests.

The curriculum cannot be understood independently of the power structures within a society. My task has been to centre that thought on quite specific aspects of educational knowledge: in particular the commodity aspect. Educational knowledge is here understood as meeting all the conditions of a Marxist commodity as Marx set them out in 'Das Capital'. I have shown how central this interpretation of educational knowledge that children acquire in schools is to the basic social objectives and purposes.

An understanding of the relationships between the conflicting educational objectives of different groups within a society is basic to the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge. The fetishism arises *mainly* because of such relationships. It is within these relationships that the stated aims are made to appear to be promoting a consensus in society, politics, economy and culture. But the appearance is false: the relationships between the various interests in the society are marked by conflict. By presenting the conflicting relationships under the guise of an assumed consensus, the statement of the aims of a curriculum expresses the dominant form of society and its corresponding interest structures, at the expense of the very consensus they purport to promote.

Where capitalism (irrespective of its variety) is the dominant form of society, the statement of curriculum aims and the educational knowledge to which they give rise, fetishise the subordinated views of the world. Fetishism is always unavoidable in any context where two conflicting forms of societies (or sub-cultures) obtain. That is because, if the statement of aims does not contain internal contradictions, one or more of the parties to the underlying conflict will have its views represented by statements that are in conflict with them.

So one of the basic requirements of the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge is the presence, at the same time and in the same place, of two essentially conflicting forms of society. So the theory may not completely obtain in the context of the 1988 National Curriculum of England and Wales. One reason for its partial applicability to social formations such as that of the United Kingdom, is that the ideological basis of the educational system and whatever goes on within it, is not in doubt in the first place. The demands of advanced capitalism in the educational system are not in question. There is no other competing form of society which can be said to be in contest with advanced capitalism in 20th century Britain. It is the case that curriculum developers, through their formulation of curricula objectives make implicit claims to liberalism, but those may be taken as an aspect which expresses the sophistication of the advanced capitalist form of society. Liberal values are not, in essence, expressions of the conflicts that arise within and between conflicting forms of society; they are rather functional to the maintenance of advanced capitalist societies. Liberal democrats within capitalism are not a rival social group. They are critics of the conscience of the capitalist order. Although this role of liberalism raises some interesting problems, these problems are beyond the scope of the present study. I only suggest that the liberal claims in the statement of curriculum aims (within the context of capitalism) do not disguise values and interpretations of the world of another form of society with which capitalism is in contest.

So the theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge does not fully obtain in advanced capitalism, such as Britain, Germany or France, although it may have limited applicability to capitalist societies such as the U. S. A. owing to the latter's cultural pluralism. Whilst there are clearly cultural divisions within the European states just mentioned, such divisions arise in the development of capitalism rather than fundamental social conflicts. In effect the hybrid society,

notwithstanding its being developing or advanced, is a fertile ground for the fetishism of educational knowledge. The theory is of central application to the contexts of developing hybrid societies since they are constituted by socio-cultural groups which are in contest with each other, and which are appealed to by the state when formulating educational objectives and the corresponding educational knowledge to which they give rise. The theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge therefore, is more of an explanatory theory for the ideology of educational knowledge in societies in transition from the traditional to the purely capitalist form of society. That is why the theory has a strong explanatory value for education in hybrid societies. So it works particularly in the developing world mainly because of the presence, in most of them, of dual and contradictory forms of society.

The theory of the fetishism of educational knowledge shows that one way in which to understand the ideology of educational knowledge, is by means of the thought that, the relationship between social forms in conflict must be considered. One will be in a dominant whilst the other(s) is (are) in subordinated position. But that which is subordinated (the traditional society) is not completely neglected in the course of educational knowledge production and dissemination. In both processes, educational knowledge is presented in such a way that it *appears* to promote the general good of both the traditional (subordinated form of society and its ideals), and the dominant form of society. But in actual fact, it does not do that. On the contrary the dominant order is disguised by the way educational knowledge is presented.

Is it then the case that fetishism of educational knowledge, where it is to be found, may be overcome? One possible strategy for attempting such a task is a liberal political scheme such as a democratic convention which is fully representative of the various conflicting ideologies and cultures in a particular

society (ies). The liberal democratic strategy offers an agenda for determining what should be taught in schools, in the form of popular participation of various sections of the society in the selection of educational knowledge. Through such a strategy, a consensus appears, an operative convention which is an attempt to lead to full agreement concerning what should be taught. Societies can, if they educate one generation in the values and procedures of liberal democracy pursue this option. Here then might be a logical space for overcoming or at least reducing, the fetishism of educational knowledge. However there are problems for the possibility of filling that logical space. There is, for example, the difficulty of representing the interests of the various and conflicting groups and the varied capacities that members of such groups have in representing their interests with force. There are here more fundamental problems of showing how the existence of a liberal democratic convention of its nature, allows members of groups to appreciate and take account of the fundamental and wider significance of the interests of all parties. The idea of such a representative body itself allows a space for fetishism. Such a liberal democratic strategy has a serious ideological problem which strengthens rather than reduces or overcomes the fetishism of educational knowledge; if that theory is well grounded fetishism will persist and the dominant group will merely use the existence of the convention to legitimate its own values and commitments. The existence of such a convention would merely perpetuate the fetishism. The philosophy of liberal democracy is itself a triumph of one view of social reality over others.

The end of fetishism of educational knowledge awaits the end of ideology. Regretably, the discussion of such an eventuality is beyond the scope of the present study. The end of ideological conflicts is not yet in sight.

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